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François Coppée

THE IMMORTALS

[Toute une jeunesse]

A ROMANCE OF YOUTH

By FRANÇOIS COPPÉE

CROWNED BY THE FRENCH ACADEMY

With a Preface by JOSÉ DE HEREDIA, *of the French Academy, and Illustrations by* N. BRIGANTI

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FRANÇOIS COPPÉE

RANÇOIS EDOUARD JOACHIM COPPÉE was born in Paris, January 12, 1842. His father was a minor *employé* in the French War Office; and, as the family consisted of six—the parents, three daughters, and a son (the subject of this essay)—the early years of the poet were not spent in great luxury. After the father's death, the young man himself entered the governmental office with its monotonous work. In the evening he studied hard at St. Geneviève Library. He made rhymes, had them even printed (*Le Reliquaire*, 1866); but the public remained indifferent until 1869, when his comedy in verse, *Le Passant*, appeared. From this period dates the reputation of Coppée—he woke up one morning a "celebrated man."

Like many of his countrymen, he is a poet, a dramatist, a novelist, and a writer of fiction. He was elected to the French Academy in 1884. Smooth-shaven, of placid figure, with pensive eyes, the hair brushed back regularly, the head of an artist, Coppée can be seen any day looking over the display of the Parisian second-hand booksellers on the Quai Malaquais; at home on the writing-desk, a page of carefullv prepared manu-

script, yet sometimes covered by cigarette-ashes; upon the wall, sketches by Jules Lefebvre and Jules Breton; a little in the distance, the gaunt form of his attentive sister and companion, Annette, occupied with household cares, ever fearful of disturbing him. Within this tranquil domicile can be heard the noise of the Parisian faubourg with its thousand different dins; the bustle of the street; the clatter of a factory; the voice of the workshop; the cries of the pedlers intermingled with the chimes of the bells of a near-by convent—a confusing buzzing noise, which the author, however, seems to enjoy; for Coppée is Parisian by birth, Parisian by education, a Parisian of the Parisians.

If as a poet we contemplate him, Coppée belongs to the group commonly called "Parnassiens"—not the Romantic School, the sentimental lyric effusion of Lamartine, Hugo, or De Musset! When the poetical lute was laid aside by the triad of 1830, it was taken up by men of quite different stamp, of even opposed tendencies. Observation of exterior matters was now greatly adhered to in poetry; it became especially descriptive and scientific; the aim of every poet was now to render most exactly, even minutely, the impressions received, or faithfully to translate into artistic language a thesis of philosophy, a discovery of science. With such a poetical doctrine, you will easily understand the importance which the "naturalistic form" henceforth assumed.

Coppée, however, is not only a maker of verses, he is an artist and a poet. Every poem seems to have

sprung from a genuine inspiration. When he sings, it is because he has something to sing about, and the result is that his poetry is nearly always interesting. Moreover, he respects the limits of his art; for while his friend and contemporary, M. Sully-Prudhomme, goes astray habitually into philosophical speculation, and his immortal senior, Victor Hugo, often declaims, if one may venture to say so, in a manner which is tedious, Coppée sticks rigorously to what may be called the proper regions of poetry.

François Coppée is not one of those superb high-priests disdainful of the throng: he is the poet of the "humble," and in his work, *Les Humbles*, he paints with a sincere emotion his profound sympathy for the sorrows, the miseries, and the sacrifices of the meek. Again, in his *Grève des Forgerons*, *Le Naufrage*, and *L'Epave*, all poems of great extension and universal reputation, he treats of simple existences, of unknown unfortunates, and of sacrifices which the daily papers do not record. The coloring and designing are precise, even if the tone be somewhat sombre, and nobody will deny that Coppée most fully possesses the technique of French poetry.

But François Coppée is known to fame as a prose-writer, too. His *Contes en prose* and his *Vingt Contes Nouveaux* are gracefully and artistically told; scarcely one of the *contes* fails to have a moral motive. The stories are short and naturally slight; some, indeed, incline rather to the essay than to the story, but each has that enthralling interest which justifies its existence. Coppée possesses preëminently the gift of presenting

concrete fact rather than abstraction. A sketch, for instance, is the first tale written by him, *Une Idylle pendant le Siège* (1875). In a novel we require strong characterization, great grasp of character, and the novelist should show us the human heart and intellect in full play and activity. In 1875 appeared also *Olivier*, followed by *L'Exilée* (1876); *Recits et Elegies* (1878); *Vingt Contes Nouveaux* (1883); and *Toute une Jeunesse* (1840), mainly an autobiography, crowned by acclaim by the Academy. *Le Coupable* was published in 1897. Finally, in 1898, appeared *La Bonne Souffrance*. In the last-mentioned work it would seem that the poet, just recovering from a severe malady, has returned to the dogmas of the Catholic Church, wherefrom he, like so many of his contemporaries, had become estranged when a youth. The poems of 1902, *Dans la Prière et dans la Lutte*, tend to confirm the correctness of this view.

Thanks to the juvenile Sarah Bernhardt, Coppée became, as before mentioned, like Byron, celebrated in one night. This happened through the performance of *Le Passant*.

As interludes to the plays there are "occasional" theatrical pieces, written for the fiftieth anniversary of the performance of *Hernani* or the two-hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the "Comédie Française." This is a wide field, indeed, which M. Coppée has cultivated to various purposes.

Take Coppée's works in their sum and totality, and the world-decree is that he is an artist, and an admirable one. He plays upon his instrument with all power and

grace. But he is no mere virtuoso. There is something in him beyond the executant. Of Malibran, Alfred de Musset says, most beautifully, that she had that "voice of the heart which alone has power to reach the heart." Here, also, behind the skilful player on language, the deft manipulator of rhyme and rhythm, the graceful and earnest writer, one feels the beating of a human heart. One feels that he is giving us personal impressions of life and its joys and sorrows; that his imagination is powerful because it is genuinely his own; that the flowers of his fancy spring spontaneously from the soil. Nor can I regard it as aught but an added grace that the strings of his instrument should vibrate so readily to what is beautiful and unselfish and delicate in human feeling.

de l'Acacémie Française.

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A ROMANCE OF YOUTH

CHAPTER I

ON THE BALCONY

AS far back as Amédée Violette can remember, he sees himself in an infant's cap upon a fifth-floor balcony covered with convolvulus; the child was very small, and the balcony seemed very large to him. Amédée had received for a birthday present a box of water-colors, with which he was sprawled out upon an old rug, earnestly intent upon his work of coloring the woodcuts in an odd volume of the *Magasin Pittoresque*, and wetting his brush from time to time in his mouth. The neighbors in the next apartment had a right to one-half of the balcony. Some one in there was playing upon the piano Marcailhou's Indiana Waltz, which was all the rage at that time. Any man, born about the year 1845, who does not feel the tears of homesickness rise to his eyes as he turns over the pages of an old number of the *Magasin Pittoresque*, or who hears some one play upon an old piano Marcailhou's Indiana Waltz, is not endowed with much sensibility.

When the child was tired of putting the "flesh color" upon the faces of all the persons in the engravings, he got up and went to peep through the railings of the balustrade. He saw extending before him, from right to left, with a graceful curve, the Rue Nôtre-Dame-des-Champs, one of the quietest streets in the Luxembourg quarter, then only half built up. The branches of the trees spread over the wooden fences, which enclosed gardens so silent and tranquil that passers-by could hear the birds singing in their cages.

It was a September afternoon, with a broad expanse of pure sky across which large clouds, like mountains of silver, moved in majestic slowness.

Suddenly a soft voice called him:

"Amédée, your father will return from the office soon. We must wash your hands before we sit down to the table, my darling."

His mother came out upon the balcony for him. His mother; his dear mother, whom he knew for so short a time! It needs an effort for him to call her to mind now, his memories are so indistinct. She was so modest and pretty, so pale, and with such charming blue eyes, always carrying her head on one side, as if the weight of her lovely chestnut hair was too heavy for her to bear, and smiling the sweet, tired smile of those who have not long to live! She made his toilette, kissed him upon his forehead, after brushing his hair. Then she laid their modest table, which was always decorated with a pretty vase of flowers. Soon the father entered. He was one of those mild, unpretentious men who let everybody run over them.

He tried to be gay when he entered his own house. He raised his little boy aloft with one arm, before kissing him, exclaiming, "Houp la!" A moment later he kissed his young wife and held her close to him, tenderly, as he asked, with an anxious look:

"Have you coughed much to-day?"

She always replied, hanging her head like a child who tells an untruth, "No, not very much."

The father would then put on an old coat—the one he took off was not very new. Amédée was then seated in a high chair before his mug, and the young mother, going into the kitchen, would bring in the supper. After opening his napkin, the father would brush back behind his ear with his hand a long lock on the right side, that always fell into his eyes.

"Is there too much of a breeze this evening? Are you afraid to go out upon the balcony, Lucie? Put a shawl on, then," said M. Violette, while his wife was pouring the water remaining in the *carafe* upon a box where some nasturtiums were growing.

"No, Paul, I am sure—take Amédée down from his chair, and let us go out upon the balcony."

It was cool upon this high balcony. The sun had set, and now the great clouds resembled mountains of gold, and a fresh odor came up from the surrounding gardens.

"Good-evening, Monsieur Violette," suddenly said a cordial voice. "What a fine evening!"

It was their neighbor, M. Gérard, an engraver, who had also come to take breath upon his end of the balcony, having spent the entire day bent over

his work. He was large and bald-headed, with a good-natured face, a red beard sprinkled with white hairs, and he wore a short, loose coat. As he spoke he lighted his clay pipe, the bowl of which represented Abd-el-Kader's face, very much colored, save the eyes and turban, which were of white enamel.

The engraver's wife, a dumpy little woman with merry eyes, soon joined her husband, pushing before her two little girls; one, the smaller of the two, was two years younger than Amédée; the other was ten years old, and already had a wise little air. She was the pianist who practised one hour a day Marcailhou's Indiana Waltz.

The children chattered through the trellis that divided the balcony in two parts. Louise, the elder of the girls, knew how to read, and told the two little ones very beautiful stories: Joseph sold by his brethren; Robinson Crusoe discovering the footprints of human beings.

Amédée, who now has gray hair upon his temples, can still remember the chills that ran down his back at the moment when the wolf, hidden under coverings and the grandmother's cap, said, with a gnashing of teeth, to little Red Riding Hood: "All the better to eat you with, my child."

It was almost dark then upon the terrace. It was all delightfully terrible!

During this time the two families, in their respective parts of the balcony, were talking familiarly together. The Violettes were quiet people, and preferred rather to listen to their neighbors than to talk themselves,

making brief replies for politeness' sake—"Ah!" "Is it possible?" "You are right."

The Gérards liked to talk. Madame Gérard, who was a good housekeeper, discussed questions of domestic economy; telling, for example, how she had been out that day, and had seen, upon the Rue du Bac, some merino: "A very good bargain, I assure you, Madame, and very wide!" Or perhaps the engraver, who was a simple politician, after the fashion of 1848, would declare that we must accept the Republic, "Oh, not the red-hot, you know, but the true, the real one!" Or he would wish that Cavaignac had been elected President at the September balloting; although he himself was then engraving—one must live, after all—a portrait of Prince Louis Napoleon, destined for the electoral platform. M. and Madame Violette let them talk; perhaps even they did not always pay attention to the conversation. When it was dark they held each other's hands and gazed at the stars.

These lovely, cool, autumnal evenings, upon the balcony, under the starry heavens, are the most distant of all Amédée's memories. Then there was a break in his memory, like a book with several leaves torn out, after which he recalls many sad days.

Winter had come, and they no longer spent their evenings upon the balcony. One could see nothing now through the windows but a dull, gray sky. Amédée's mother was ill and always remained in her bed. When he was installed near the bed, before a little table, cutting out with scissors the hussars from a sheet of Epinal, his poor mamma almost frightened

him, as she leaned her elbow upon the pillow and gazed at him so long and so sadly, while her thin white hands restlessly pushed back her beautiful, disordered hair, and two red hectic spots burned under her cheek-bones.

It was not she who now came to take him from his bed in the morning, but an old woman in a short jacket, who did not kiss him, and who smelled horribly of snuff.

His father, too, did not pay much attention to him now. When he returned in the evening from the office he always brought bottles and little packages from the apothecary. Sometimes he was accompanied by the physician, a large man, very much dressed and perfumed, who panted for breath after climbing the five flights of stairs. Once Amédée saw this stranger put his arms around his mother as she sat in her bed, and lay his head for a long time against her back. The child asked, "What for, mamma?"

M. Violette, more nervous than ever, and continually throwing back the rebellious lock behind his ear, would accompany the doctor to the door and stop there to talk with him. Then Amédée's mother would call to him, and he would climb upon the bed, where she would gaze at him with her bright eyes and press him to her breast, saying, in a sad tone, as if she pitied him: "My poor little Médée! My poor little Médée!" Why was it? What did it all mean?

His father would return with a forced smile which was pitiful to see.

"Well, what did the doctor say?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing! You are much better. Only, my poor Lucie, we must put on another blister to-night."

Oh, how monotonous and slow these days were to the little Amédée, near the drowsy invalid, in the close room smelling of drugs, where only the old snuff-taker entered once an hour to bring a cup of tea or put charcoal upon the fire!

Sometimes their neighbor, Madame Gérard, would come to inquire after the sick lady.

"Still very feeble, my good Madame Gérard," his mother would respond. "Ah, I am beginning to get discouraged."

But Madame Gérard would not let her be despondent.

"You see, Madame Violette, it is this horrible, endless winter. It is almost March now; they are already selling boxes of primroses in little carts on the sidewalks. You will surely be better as soon as the sun shines. If you like, I will take little Amédée back with me to play with my little girls. It will amuse the child."

So it happened that the good neighbor kept the child every afternoon, and he became very fond of the little Gérard children.

Four little rooms, that is all; but with a quantity of old, picturesque furniture; engravings, casts, and pictures painted by comrades were on the walls; the doors were always open, and the children could always play where they liked, chase each other through the apartments or pillage them. In the drawing-room,

which had been transformed into a work-room, the artist sat upon a high stool, point in hand; the light from a curtainless window, sifting through the transparent paper, made the worthy man's skull shine as he leaned over his copper plate. He worked hard all day; with an expensive house and two girls to bring up, it was necessary. In spite of his advanced opinions, he continued to engrave his Prince Louis—"A rogue who is trying to juggle us out of a Republic." At the very most, he stopped only two or three times a day to smoke his Abd-el-Kader. Nothing distracted him from his work; not even the little ones, who, tired of playing their piece for four hands upon the piano, would organize, with Amédée, a game of hide-and-seek close by their father, behind the old Empire sofa ornamented with bronze lions' heads. But Madame Gérard, in her kitchen, where she was always cooking something good for dinner, sometimes thought they made too great an uproar. Then Maria, a real hoyden, in trying to catch her sister, would push an old armchair against a Renaissance chest and make all the Rouen crockery tremble.

"Now then, now then, children!" exclaimed Madame Gérard, from the depths of her lair, from which escaped a delicious odor of bacon. "Let your father have a little quiet, and go and play in the dining-room."

They obeyed; for there they could move chairs as they liked, build houses of them, and play at making calls. Did ever anybody have such wild ideas at five years of age as this Maria? She took the arm of

Amédée, whom she called her little husband, and went to call upon her sister and show her her little child, a pasteboard doll with a large head, wrapped up in a napkin.

"As you see, Madame, it is a boy."

"What do you intend to make of him when he grows up?" asked Louise, who lent herself complacently to the play, for she was ten years old and quite a young lady, if you please.

"Why, Madame," replied Maria, gravely, "he will be a soldier."

At that moment the engraver, who had left his bench to stretch his legs a little and to light his Abd-el-Kader for the third time, came and stood at the threshold of his room. Madame Gérard, reassured as to the state of her stew, which was slowly cooking—and oh, how good it smelled in the kitchen!—entered the dining-room. Both looked at the children, so comical and so graceful, as they made their little grimaces! Then the husband glanced at his wife, and the wife at the husband, and both burst out into hearty laughter.

There never was any laughter in the apartment of the Violettes. It was cough! cough! cough! almost to suffocation, almost to death! This gentle young woman with the heavy hair was about to die! When the beautiful starry evenings should come again, she would no longer linger on the balcony, or press her husband's hand as they gazed at the stars. Little Amédée did not understand it; but he felt a vague terror of something dreadful happening in the house. Everything alarmed him now. He was afraid of the

old woman who smelled of snuff, and who, when she dressed him in the morning, looked at him with a pitying air; he was afraid of the doctor, who climbed the five flights of stairs twice a day now, and left a whiff of perfume behind him; afraid of his father, who did not go to his office any more, whose beard was often three days old, and who feverishly paced the little parlor, tossing back with a distracted gesture the lock of hair behind his ear. He was afraid of his mother, alas! of his mother, whom he had seen that evening, by the light from the night-lamp, buried in the pillows, her delicate nose and chin thrown up, and who did not seem to recognize him, in spite of her wide-open eyes, when his father took her child in his arms and leaned over her with him that he might kiss her cold forehead covered with sweat!

At last the terrible day arrived, a day that Amédée never will forget, although he was then a very small child.

What awakened him that morning was his father's embrace as he came and took him from his bed. His father's eyes were wild and bloodshot from so much crying. Why was their neighbor, M. Gérard, there so early in the morning, and with great tears rolling down his cheeks too? He kept beside M. Violette, as if watching him, and patted him upon the back affectionately, saying:

"Now then, my poor friend! Have courage, courage!"

But the poor friend had no more. He let M. Gérard take the child from him, and then his head fell like a

dead person's upon the good engraver's shoulder, and he began to weep with heavy sobs that shook his whole body.

"Mamma! See mamma!" cried the little Amédée, full of terror.

Alas! he never will see her again! At the Gérards, where they carried him and the kind neighbor dressed him, they told him that his mother had gone for a long time, a very long time; that he must love his papa very much and think only of him; and other things that he could not understand and dared not ask the meaning of, but which filled him with consternation.

It was strange! The engraver and his wife busied themselves entirely with him, watching him every moment. The little ones, too, treated him in a singular, almost respectful manner. What had caused such a change? Louise did not open her piano, and when little Maria wished to take her "menagerie" from the lower part of the buffet, Madame Gérard said sharply, as she wiped the tears from her eyes: "You must not play to-day."

After breakfast Madame Gérard put on her hat and shawl and went out, taking Amédée with her. They got into a carriage that took them through streets that the child did not know, across a bridge in the middle of which stood a large brass horseman, with his head crowned with laurel, and stopped before a large house and entered with the crowd, where a very agile and rapid young man put some black clothes on Amédée.

On their return the child found his father seated at the dining-room table with M. Gérard, and both of them were writing addresses upon large sheets of paper bordered with black. M. Violette was not crying, but his face showed deep lines of grief, and he let his lock of hair fall over his right eye.

At the sight of little Amédée, in his black clothes, he uttered a groan, and arose, staggering like a drunken man, bursting into tears again.

Oh, no! he never will forget that day, nor the horrible next day, when Madame Gérard came and dressed him in the morning in his black clothes, while he listened to the noise of heavy feet and blows from a hammer in the next room. He suddenly remembered that he had not seen his mother since two days before.

"Mamma! I want to see mamma!"

It was necessary then to try to make him understand the truth. Madame Gérard repeated to him that he ought to be very wise and good, and try to console his father, who had much to grieve him; for his mother had gone away forever; that she was in heaven.

In heaven! heaven is very high up and far off. If his mother was in heaven, what was it that those porters dressed in black carried away in the heavy box that they knocked at every turn of the staircase? What did that solemn carriage, which he followed through all the rain, quickening his childish steps, with his little hand tightly clasped in his father's, carry away? What did they bury in that hole, from which

an odor of freshly dug earth was emitted—in that hole surrounded by men in black, and from which his father turned away his head in horror? What was it that they hid in this ditch, in this garden full of crosses and stone urns, where the newly budded trees shone in the March sun after the shower, large drops of water still falling from their branches like tears?

His mother was in heaven! On the evening of that dreadful day Amédée dared not ask to "see mamma" when he was seated before his father at the table, where, for a long time, the old woman in a short jacket had placed only two plates. The poor widower, who had just wiped his eyes with his napkin, had put upon one of the plates a little meat cut up in bits for Amédée. He was very pale, and as Amédée sat in his high chair, he asked himself whether he should recognize his mother's sweet, caressing look, some day, in one of those stars that she loved to watch, seated upon the balcony on cool September nights, pressing her husband's hand in the darkness.

CHAPTER II

SAD CHANGES

TREES are like men; there are some that have no luck. A genuinely unfortunate tree was the poor sycamore which grew in the playground of an institution for boys on the Rue de la Grande-Chaumière, directed by M. Batifol.

Chance might just as well have made it grow upon the banks of a river, upon some pretty bluff, where it might have seen the boats pass; or, better still, upon the mall in some garrison village, where it could have had the pleasure of listening twice a week to military music. But, no! it was written in the book of fate that this unlucky sycamore should lose its bark every summer, as a serpent changes its skin, and should scatter the ground with its dead leaves at the first frost, in the playground of the Batifol institution, which was a place without any distractions.

This solitary tree, which was like any other sycamore, middle-aged and without any singularities, ought to have had the painful feeling that it served in a measure to deceive the public. In fact, upon the advertisement of the Batifol institution (*Cours du*

lycée Henri IV. Préparation au baccalauréat et aux écoles de l'Etat), one read these fallacious words, "There is a garden;" when in reality it was only a vulgar court gravelled with stones from the river, with a paved gutter in which one could gather half a dozen of lost marbles, a broken top, and a certain number of shoe-nails, and after recreation hours still more. This solitary sycamore was supposed to justify the illusion and fiction of the garden promised in the advertisement; but as trees certainly have common sense, this one should have been conscious that it was not a garden of itself.

It was a very unjust fate for an inoffensive tree which never had harmed anybody; only expanding, at one side of the gymnasium portico, in a perfect rectangle formed by a prison-wall, bristling with the glass of broken bottles, and by three buildings of distressing similarity, showing, above the numerous doors on the ground floor, inscriptions which merely to read induced a yawn: Hall 1, Hall 2, Hall 3, Hall 4, Stairway A, Stairway B, Entrance to the Dormitories, Dining-room, Laboratory.

The poor sycamore was dying of *ennui* in this dismal place. Its only happy seasons—the recreation hours, when the court echoed with the shouts and the laughter of the boys—were spoiled for it by the sight of two or three pupils who were punished by being made to stand at the foot of its trunk. Parisian birds, who are not fastidious, rarely lighted upon the tree, and never built their nests there. It might even be imagined that this disenchanted tree, when the wind

agitated its foliage, would charitably say, "Believe me! the place is good for nothing. Go and make love elsewhere!"

In the shade of this sycamore, planted under an unlucky star, the greater part of Amédée's infancy was passed.

M. Violette was an employé of the Ministry, and was obliged to work seven hours a day, one or two hours of which were devoted to going wearily through a bundle of probably superfluous papers and documents. The rest of the time was given to other occupations as varied as they were intellectual; such as yawning, filing his nails, talking about his chiefs, groaning over the slowness of promotion, cooking a potato or a sausage in the stove for his luncheon, reading the newspaper down to the editor's signature, and advertisements in which some country curé expresses his artless gratitude at being cured at last of an obstinate disease. In recompense for this daily captivity, M. Violette received, at the end of the month, a sum exactly sufficient to secure his household soup and beef, with a few vegetables.

In order that his son might attain such a distinguished position, M. Violette's father, a watch-maker in Chartres, had sacrificed everything, and died penniless. The Silvio Pellico official, during these exasperating and tiresome hours, sometimes regretted not having simply succeeded his father. He could see himself, in imagination, in the light little shop near the cathedral, with a magnifying-glass fixed in his eye, ready to inspect some farmer's old "turnip," and

suspended over his bench thirty silver and gold watches left by farmers the week before, who would profit by the next market-day to come and get them, all going together with a merry tick. It may be questioned whether a trade as low as this would have been fitting for a young man of education, a Bachelor of Arts, crammed with Greek roots and quotations, able to prove the existence of God, and to recite without hesitation the dates of the reigns of Nabonassar and of Nabopolassar. This watch-maker, this simple artisan, understood modern genius better. This modest shopkeeper acted according to the democratic law and followed the instinct of a noble and wise ambition. He made of his son—a sensible and intelligent boy—a machine to copy documents, and spend his days guessing the conundrums in the illustrated newspapers, which he read as easily as M. Ledrain would decipher the cuneiform inscriptions on an Assyrian brick. Also —an admirable result, which should rejoice the old watch-maker's shade—his son had become a gentleman, a functionary, so splendidly remunerated by the State that he was obliged to wear patches of cloth, as near like the trousers as possible, on their seat; and his poor young wife, during her life, had always been obliged, as rent-day drew near, to carry the soup-ladle and six silver covers to the pawn-shop.

At all events, M. Violette was a widower now, and being busy all day was very much embarrassed with the care of his little son. His neighbors, the Gérards, were very kind to Amédée, and continued to keep him with them all the afternoon. This state of affairs

could not always continue, and M. Violette hesitated to abuse his worthy friends' kindness in that way.

However, Amédée gave them little trouble, and Mamma Gérard loved him as if he were her own. The orphan was now inseparable from little Maria, a perfect little witch, who became prettier every day. The engraver, having found in a cupboard the old bearskin cap which he had worn as a grenadier in the National Guard, a headdress that had been suppressed since '48, gave it to the children. What a magnificent plaything it was, and how well calculated to excite their imagination! It was immediately transformed in their minds into a frightfully large and ferocious bear, which they chased through the apartment, lying in wait for it behind armchairs, striking at it with sticks, and puffing out their little cheeks with all their might to say "Boum!" imitating the report of a gun. This hunting diversion completed the destruction of the old furniture. Tranquil in the midst of the joyous uproar and disorder, the engraver was busily at work finishing off the broad ribbon of the Legion of Honor, and the large bullion epaulettes of the Prince President, whom, as a suspicious republican and foreseeing the *coup d'état*, he detested with all his heart.

"Truly, Monsieur Violette," said Mother Gérard to the employé, when he came for his little son upon his return from the office, and excused himself for the trouble that the child must give his neighbors, "truly, I assure you, he does not disturb us in the least. Wait a little before you send him to school.

He is very quiet, and if Maria did not excite him so—upon my word, she is more of a boy than he—your Amédée would always be looking at the pictures. My Louise hears him read every day two pages in the *Moral Tales*, and yesterday he amused Gérard by telling him the story of the grateful elephant. He can go to school later—wait a little."

But M. Violette had decided to send Amédée to M. Batifol's. "Oh, yes, as a day scholar, of course! It is so convenient; not two steps' distance. This will not prevent little Amédée from seeing his friends often. He is nearly seven years old, and very backward; he hardly knows how to make his letters. One can not begin with children too soon," and much more to the same effect.

This was the reason why, one fine spring day, M. Violette was ushered into M. Batifol's office, who, the servant said, would be there directly.

M. Batifol's office was hideous. In the three bookcases which the master of the house—a snob and a greedy schoolmaster—never opened, were some of those books that one can buy upon the quays by the running yard; for example, Laharpe's *Cours de Littérature*, and an endless edition of Rollin, whose tediousness seems to ooze out through their bindings. The cylindrical office-table, one of those masterpieces of veneered mahogany which the Faubourg St.-Antoine still keeps the secret of making, was surmounted by a globe of the world.

Suddenly, through the open window, little Amédée saw the sycamore in the yard. A young blackbird,

who did not know the place, came and perched for an instant only upon one of its branches.

We may fancy the tree saying to it:

"What are you doing here? The Luxembourg is only a short distance from here, and is charming. Children are there, making mud-pies, nurses upon the seats chattering with the military, lovers promenading, holding hands. Go there, you simpleton!"

The blackbird flew away, and the university tree, once more solitary and alone, drooped its dispirited leaves. Amédée, in his confused childish desire for information, was just ready to ask why this sycamore looked so morose, when the door opened and M. Batifol appeared. The master of the school had a severe aspect, in spite of his almost indecorous name. He resembled a hippopotamus clothed in an ample black coat. He entered slowly and bowed in a dignified way to M. Violette, then seated himself in a leather armchair before his papers, and, taking off his velvet skull-cap, revealed such a voluminous round, yellow baldness that little Amédée compared it with terror to the globe on the top of his desk.

It was just the same thing! These two round balls were twins! There was even upon M. Batifol's cranium an eruption of little red pimples, grouped almost exactly like an archipelago in the Pacific Ocean.

"Whom have I the honor——?" asked the schoolmaster, in an unctuous voice, an excellent voice for proclaiming names at the distribution of prizes.

M. Violette was not a brave man. It was very foolish, but when the senior clerk called him into his

office to do some work, he was always seized with a sort of stammering and shaking of the limbs. A person so imposing as M. Batifol was not calculated to give him assurance. Amédée was timid, too, like his father, and while the child, frightened by the resemblance of the sphere to M. Batifol's bald head, was already trembling, M. Violette, much agitated, was trying to think of something to say, consequently, he said nothing of any account. However, he ended by repeating almost the same things he had said to Mamma Gérard: "My son is nearly seven years old, and very backward, etc."

The teacher appeared to listen to M. Violette with benevolent interest, inclining his geographical cranium every few seconds. In reality, he was observing and judging his visitors. The father's scanty overcoat, the rather pale face of the little boy, all betokened poverty. It simply meant a day scholar at thirty francs a month, nothing more. So M. Batifol shortened the "speech" that under like circumstances he addressed to his new pupils.

He would take charge of his "young friend" (thirty francs a month, that is understood, and the child will bring his own luncheon in a little basket) who would first be placed in an elementary class. Certain fathers prefer, and they have reason to do so, that their sons should be half-boarders, with a healthful and abundant repast at noon. But M. Batifol did not insist upon it. His young friend would then be placed in the infant class, at first; but he would be prepared there at once, *ab ovo*, one day to receive lessons in this Uni-

versity of France, *alma parens* (instruction in foreign languages not included in the ordinary price, naturally), which by daily study, competition between scholars (accomplishments, such as dancing, music, and fencing, to be paid for separately; that goes without saying) prepare children for social life, and make men and citizens of them.

M. Violette contented himself with the day school at thirty francs, and for a good reason. The affair was settled. Early the next morning Amédée would enter the "ninth preparatory."

"Give me your hand, my young friend," said the master, as father and son arose to take their leave.

Amédée reached out his hand, and M. Batifol took it in his, which was so heavy, large, and cold that the child shivered at the contact, and fancied he was touching a leg of mutton of six or seven pounds' weight, freshly killed, and sent from the butcher's.

Finally they left. Early the next morning, Amédée, provided with a little basket, in which the old snuff-taker had put a little bottle of red wine, and some sliced veal, and jam tarts, presented himself at the boarding-school, to be prepared without delay for the teaching of the *alma parens*.

The hippopotamus clothed in black did not take off his skull-cap this time, to the child's great regret, for he wished to assure himself if the degrees of latitude and longitude were checked off in squares on M. Batifol's cranium as they were on the terrestrial globe. He conducted his pupil to his class at once and presented him to the master.

"Here is a new day scholar, Monsieur Tavernier. You will find out how far advanced he is in reading and writing, if you please." M. Tavernier was a tall young man with a sallow complexion, a bachelor who, had he been living like his late father, a sergeant of the gendarmes, in a pretty house surrounded by apple-trees and green grass, would not, perhaps, have had that *papier-mâché* appearance, and would not have been dressed at eight o'clock in the morning in a black coat of the kind we see hanging in the Morgue. M. Tavernier received the newcomer with a sickly smile, which disappeared as soon as M. Batifol left the room.

"Go and take your place in that empty seat there, in the third row," said M. Tavernier, in an indifferent tone.

He deigned, however, to conduct Amédée to the seat which he was to occupy. Amédée's neighbor, one of the future citizens preparing for social life—several with patches upon their trousers—had been naughty enough to bring into class a handful of cockchafers. He was punished by a quarter of an hour's standing up, which he did soon after, sulking at the foot of the sycamore-tree in the large court.

"You will soon see what a cur he is," whispered the pupil in disgrace, as soon as the teacher had returned to his seat.

M. Tavernier struck his ruler on the edge of his chair, and, having reëstablished silence, invited pupil Godard to recite his lesson.

Pupil Godard, who was a chubby-faced fellow with

sleepy eyes, rose automatically and in one single stream, like a running tap, recited, without stopping to take breath, "The Wolf and the Lamb," rolling off La Fontaine's fable like the thread from a bobbin run by steam.

"The–strongest–reason–is–always–the–best–and–we–will–prove–it–at–once–a–lamb–was–quenching–his–thirst–in–a–stream–of–pure–running–water——"

Suddenly Godard was confused, he hesitated. The machine had been badly oiled. Something obstructed the bobbin.

"In–a–stream–of–pure–running–water——in–a–stream——"

Then he stopped short, the tap was closed. Godard did not know his lesson, and he, too, was condemned to remain on guard under the sycamore during recess.

After pupil Godard came pupil Grosdidier; then Blanc, then Moreau (Gaston), then Moreau (Ernest), then Malepert; then another, and another, who babbled with the same intelligence and volubility, with the same piping voice, this cruel and wonderful fable. It was as irritating and monotonous as a fine rain. All the pupils in the "ninth preparatory" were disgusted for fifteen years, at least, with this most exquisite of French poems.

Little Amédée wanted to cry; he listened with stupefaction blended with fright as the scholars by turns unwound their bobbins. To think that to-morrow he must do the same! He never would be able. M. Tavernier frightened him very much, too. The yellow-complexioned usher, seated nonchalantly in his arm-

chair, was not without pretension, in spite of his black coat with the "take-me-out-of-pawn" air, polished his nails, and only opened his mouth at times to utter a reprimand or pronounce sentence of punishment.

This was school, then! Amédée recalled the pleasant reading-lessons that the eldest of the Gérards had given him—that good Louise, so wise and serious and only ten years old, pointing out his letters to him in a picture alphabet with a knitting-needle, always so patient and kind. The child was overcome at the very first with a disgust for school, and gazed through the window which lighted the room at the noiselessly moving, large, indented leaves of the melancholy sycamore.

CHAPTER III

PAPA AND MAMMA GÉRARD

NE, two, three years rolled by without anything very remarkable happening to the inhabitants of the fifth story.

The quarter had not changed, and it still had the appearance of a suburban faubourg. They had just erected, within gunshot of the house where the Violettes and Gérards lived, a large five-story building, upon whose roof still trembled in the wind the masons' withered bouquets. But that was all. In front of them, on the lot "For Sale," enclosed by rotten boards, where one could always see tufts of nettles and a goat tied to a stake, and upon the high wall above which by the end of April the lilacs hung in their perfumed clusters, the rains had not effaced this brutal declaration of love, scraped with a knife in the plaster: "When Mélie wishes she can have me," and signed "Eugène."

Three years had passed, and little Amédée had grown a trifle. At that time a child born in the centre of Paris—for example, in the labyrinth of infected streets about the Halles—would have grown up without having any idea of the change of seasons other than by the state of the temperature and the narrow strip of

sky which he could see by raising his head. Even to-day certain poor children—the poor never budge from their hiding-places—learn of the arrival of winter only by the odor of roasted chestnuts; of spring, by the boxes of gillyflowers in the fruiterer's stall; of summer, by the water-carts passing, and of autumn, by the heaps of oyster-shells at the doors of wine-shops. The broad sky, with its confused shapes of cloud architecture, the burning gold of the setting sun behind the masses of trees, the enchanting stillness of moonlight upon the river, all these grand and magnificent spectacles are for the delight of those who live in suburban quarters, or play there sometimes. The sons of people who work in buttons and jet spend their infancy playing on staircases that smell of lead, or in courts that resemble wells, and do not suspect that nature exists. At the outside they suspect that nature may exist when they see the horses on Palm Sunday decorated with bits of boxwood behind each ear. What matters it, after all, if the child has imagination? A star reflected in a gutter will reveal to him an immense nocturnal poem; and he will breathe all the intoxication of summer in the full-blown rose which the grisette from the next house lets fall from her hair.

Amédée had had the good fortune of being born in that delicious and melancholy suburb of Paris which had not yet become "Haussmannized," and was full of wild and charming nooks.

His father, the widower, could not be consoled, and tried to wear out his grief in long promenades, going out on clear evenings, holding his little boy by the

hand, toward the more solitary places. They followed those fine boulevards, formerly in the suburbs, where there were giant elms, planted in the time of Louis XIV, ditches full of grass, ruined palisades, showing through their opening market-gardens where melons glistened in the rays of the setting sun. Both were silent; the father lost in reveries, Amédée absorbed in the confused dreams of a child. They went long distances, passing the Barrière d'Enfer, reaching unknown parts, which produced the same effect upon an inhabitant of Rue Montmartre as the places upon an old map of the world, marked with the mysterious words *Mare ignotum*, would upon a savant of the Middle Ages. There were many houses in this ancient suburb; curious old buildings, nearly all of one story.

Sometimes they would pass a public-house painted in a sinister wine-color; or else a garden hedged in by acacias, at the fork of two roads, with arbors and a sign consisting of a very small windmill at the end of a pole, turning in the fresh evening breeze. It was almost country; the grass grew upon the sidewalks, springing up in the road between the broken pavements. A poppy flashed here and there upon the tops of the low walls. They met very few people; now and then some poor person, a woman in a cap dragging along a crying child, a workman burdened with his tools, a belated invalid, and sometimes in the middle of the sidewalk, in a cloud of dust, a flock of exhausted sheep, bleating desperately, and nipped in the legs by dogs hurrying them toward the abattoir. The father and son would walk straight ahead until it was

dark under the trees; then they would retrace their steps, the sharp air stinging their faces. Those ancient hanging street-lamps, the tragic lanterns of the time of the Terror, were suspended at long intervals in the avenue, mingling their dismal twinkle with the pale gleams of the green twilight sky.

These sorrowful promenades with his melancholy companion would commonly end a tiresome day at Batifol's school. Amédée was now in the "seventh," and knew already that the phrase, "the will of God," could not be turned into Latin by *bonitas divina*, and that the word *cornu* was not declinable. These long, silent hours spent at his school-desk, or beside a person absorbed in grief, might have become fatal to the child's disposition, had it not been for his good friends, the Gérards. He went to see them as often as he was able, a spare hour now and then, and most of the day on Thursdays. The engraver's house was always full of good-nature and gayety, and Amédée felt comfortable and really happy there.

The good Gérards, besides their Louise and Maria, to say nothing of Amédée, whom they looked upon as one of the family, had now taken charge of a fourth child, a little girl, named Rosine, who was precisely the same age as their youngest.

This was the way it happened. Above the Gérards, in one of the mansards upon the sixth floor, lived a printer named Combarieu, with his wife or mistress—the *concierge* did not know which, nor did it matter much. The woman had just deserted him, leaving a child of eight years. One could expect nothing better

of a creature who, according to the *concierge*, fed her husband upon pork-butcher's meat, to spare herself the trouble of getting dinner, and passed the entire day with uncombed hair, in a dressing-sacque, reading novels, and telling her fortune with cards. The grocer's daughter declared she had met her one evening at a dancing-hall, seated with a fireman before a salad-bowl full of wine, prepared in the French fashion.

During the day Combarieu, although a red-hot Republican, sent his little girl to the Sisters; but he went out every evening with a mysterious air and left the child alone. The *concierge* even uttered in a low voice, with the romantic admiration which that class of people have for conspirators, the terrible word "secret society," and asserted that the printer had a musket concealed under his straw bed.

These revelations were of a nature to excite M. Gérard's sympathy in favor of his neighbor, for the *coup d'état* and the proclamation of the Empire had irritated him very much. Had it not been his melancholy duty to engrave, the day after the second of December—he must feed his family first of all—a Bonapartist allegory entitled, "The Uncle and the Nephew," where one saw France extending its hand to Napoleon I and Prince Louis, while soaring above the group was an eagle with spreading wings, holding in one of his claws the cross of the Legion of Honor?

One day the engraver asked his wife, as he lighted his pipe—he had given up Abd-el-Kader and smoked now a Barbès—if they ought not to interest themselves a little in the abandoned child. It needed noth-

ing more to arouse the good woman, who had already said more than once: "What a pity!" as she saw little Rosine waiting for her father in the lodge of the *concierge*, asleep in a chair before the stove. She coaxed the child to play with her children. Rosine was very pretty, with bright eyes, a droll little Parisian nose, and a mass of straw-colored curly hair escaping from her cap. The little rogue let fly quite often some gutter expression, such as "Hang it!" or "Tol-de-rol-dol!" at which Madame Gérard would exclaim, "What do I hear, Mademoiselle?" but she was intelligent and soon corrected herself.

One Sunday morning, Combarieu, having learned of their kindness to his child, made a visit to thank them.

Very dark, with a livid complexion, all hair and beard, and trying to look like the head of Jesus Christ, in his long black blouse he embodied the type of a club conspirator, a representative of the workingmen. A Freemason, probably; a solemn drunkard, who became intoxicated oftener on big words than on native wine, and spoke in a loud, pretentious voice, gazing before him with large, stupid eyes swimming in a sort of ecstasy; his whole person made one think of a boozy preacher. He immediately inspired the engraver with respect, and dazzled him by the fascination which the audacious exert over the timid. M. Gérard thought he discerned in Combarieu one of those superior men whom a cruel fate had caused to be born among the lower class and in whom poverty had stifled genius.

Enlightened as to the artist's political preferences by the bowl of his pipe, Combarieu complacently eulogized himself. Upon his own admission he had at first been foolish enough to dream of a universal brotherhood, a holy alliance of the people. He had even written poems which he had published himself, notably an "Ode to Poland," and an "Epistle to Béranger," which latter had evoked an autograph letter from the illustrious song-writer. But he was no longer such a simpleton.

"When one has seen what we have seen during June, and on the second of December, there is no longer any question of sentiment." Here the engraver, as a hospitable host, brought a bottle of wine and two glasses. "No, Monsieur Gérard, I thank you, I take nothing between my meals. The workingmen have been deceived too often, and at the next election we shall not let the *bourgeoisie* strangle the Republic." (M. Gérard had now uncorked the bottle.) "Only a finger! Enough! Enough! simply so as not to refuse you. While waiting, let us prepare ourselves. Just now the Eastern question muddles us, and behold 'Badinguet,'* with a big affair upon his hands. You have some wine here that is worth drinking. If he loses one battle he is done for. One glass more? Ah! you make me depart from my usual custom—absolutely done for. But this time we shall keep our eyes open. No half measures! We will return to the great methods of 'ninety-three—the Committee of Public Safety, the Law of Suspects, the Revolutionary

*A nickname given to Napoleon III.

Tribunal, every damned one of them! and, if it is necessary, a permanent guillotine! To your good health!"

So much energy frightened Father Gérard a little; for in spite of his Barbès pipe-bowl he was not a genuine red-hot Republican. He dared not protest, however, and blushed a little as he thought that the night before an editor had proposed to him to engrave a portrait of the new Empress, very décolleté, and showing her famous shoulders, and that he had not said No; for his daughters needed new shoes, and his wife had declared the day before that she had not a gown to put on.

So for several months he had four children—Amédée, Louise, Maria, and little Rose Combarieu—to make a racket in his apartment. Certainly they were no longer babies; they did not play at making calls nor chase the old fur hat around the room; they were more sensible, and the old furniture had a little rest. And it was time, for all the chairs were lame, two of the larger ones had lost an arm each, and the Empire sofa had lost the greater part of its hair through the rents in its dark-green velvet covering. The unfortunate square piano had had no pity shown it; more out of tune and asthmatic than ever, it was now always open, and one could read above the yellow and worn-out keyboard a once famous name—"Sebastian Erard, Manufacturer of Pianos and Harps for S.A.R. Madame la Duchesse de Berri." Not only Louise, the eldest of the Gérards—a large girl now, having been to her first communion, dressing her hair in bands, and wearing white waists—not only Louise,

who had become a good musician, had made the piano submit to long tortures, but her sister Maria, and Amédée also, already played the *Bouquet de Bal* or *Papa, les p'tits bateaux*. Rosine, too, in her character of street urchin, knew all the popular songs, and spent entire hours in picking out the airs with one finger upon the old instrument.

Ah! the songs of those days, the last of romanticism, the make-believe *Orientales; Odes* and *Ballads*, by the dozen; *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie*, with their pages, turrets, châtelaines; bull-fighters, Spanish ladies; vivandières, beguiled away from their homes under the pale of the church, "near a stream of running water, by a gay and handsome chevalier," and many other such silly things—Amédée will remember them always! They bring back to him, clearly and strongly, certain happy hours in his childhood! They make him smell again at times even the odor that pervaded the Gérards' house. A mule-driver's song will bring up before his vision the engraver working at his plate before the curtainless window on a winter's day. It snows in the streets, and large white flakes are slowly falling behind the glass; but the room, ornamented with pictures and busts, is lighted and heated by a bright coke fire. Amédée can see himself seated in a corner by the fire, learning by heart a page of the "Epitome" which he must recite the next morning at M. Batifol's. Maria and Rosine are crouched at his feet, with a box of glass beads, which they are stringing into a necklace. It was comfortable; the whole apartment smelled of the engraver's pipe, and in the dining-

room, whose door is half opened, Louise is at the piano, singing, in a fresh voice, some lines where "Castilla" rhymes with "mantilla," and "Andalousie" with "jealousy," while her agile fingers played on the old instrument an accompaniment supposed to imitate bells and castanets.

Or perhaps it is a radiant morning in June, and they are in the dining-room; the balcony door is open wide, and a large hornet buzzes loudly in the vine. Louise is still at the piano; she is singing this time, and trying to reach the low tones of a dramatic romance where a Corsican child is urged on to vengeance by his father:

Tiens, prends ma carabine!
Sur toi veillera Dieu——

This is a great day, the day when Mamma Gérard makes her gooseberry preserves. There is a large basin already full of it on the table. What a delicious odor! A perfume of roses mingled with that of warm sugar. Maria and Rosine have just slipped into the kitchen, the gourmands! But Louise is a serious person, and will not interrupt her singing for such a trifle. She continues to sing in a low voice: and at the moment when Amédée stands speechless with admiration before her, as she is scolding in a terrible tone and playing dreadful chords, lo and behold! here come the children, both with pink moustaches, and licking their lips voluptuously.

Ah! these were happy hours to Amédée. They consoled him for the interminable days at M. Batifol's.

Having passed the ninth preparatory grade, under the direction of the indolent M. Tavernier, always busy polishing his nails, like a Chinese mandarin, the child had for a professor in the eighth grade Père Montandeuil, a poor fellow stupefied by thirty years of teaching, who secretly employed all his spare hours in composing five-act tragedies, and who, by dint of carrying to and going for his manuscripts at the Odéon, ended by marrying the stage-doorkeeper's daughter. In the seventh grade Amédée groaned under the tyranny of M. Prudhommod, a man from the country, with a smattering of Latin and a terribly violent temper, throwing at the pupils the insults of a plowboy. Now he had entered the sixth grade, under M. Bance, an unfortunate fellow about twenty years old, ugly, lame, and foolishly timid, whom M. Batifol reproached severely with not having made himself respected, and whose eyes filled with tears every morning when, upon entering the schoolroom, he was obliged to efface with a cloth a caricature of himself made by some of his pupils.

Everything in M. Batifol's school—the grotesque and miserable teachers, the ferocious and cynical pupils, the dingy, dusty, and ink-stained rooms—saddened and displeased Amédée. Although very intelligent, he was disgusted with the sort of instruction there, which was served out in portions, like soldier's rations, and would have lost courage but for his little friend, Louise Gérard, who out of sheer kindness constituted herself his school-mistress, guiding and inspiriting him, and working hard at the rudiments of L'homond's Grammar and Alexandre's Dictionary, to

help the child struggle with his *De Viris*. Unfortunate indeed is he who has not had, during his infancy, a petticoat near him—the sweet influence of a woman. He will always have something coarse in his mind and hard in his heart. Without this excellent and kind Louise, Amédée would have been exposed to this danger. His mother was dead, and M. Violette, alas! was always overwhelmed with his grief, and, it must be admitted, somewhat neglected his little son.

The widower could not be consoled. Since his wife's death he had grown ten years older, and his refractory lock of hair had become perfectly white. His Lucie had been the sole joy in his commonplace and obscure life. She was so pretty, so sweet! such a good manager, dressing upon nothing, and making things seem luxurious with only one flower! M. Violette existed only on this dear and cruel souvenir, living his humble idyll over again in his mind.

He had had six years of this happiness. One of his comrades took him to pass an evening with an old friend who was captain in the Invalides. The worthy man had lost an arm at Waterloo; he was a relative of Lucie, a good-natured old fellow, amiable and lively, delighting in arranging his apartments into a sort of Bonapartist chapel and giving little entertainments with cake and punch, while Lucie's mother, a cousin of the captain, did the honors. M. Violette immediately observed the young girl, seated under a "Bataille des Pyramides" with two swords crossed above it, a carnation in her hair. It was in midsummer, and through the open window one could see the magnifi-

cent moonlight, which shone upon the esplanade and made the huge cannon shine. They were playing charades, and when it came Lucie's turn to be questioned among all the guests, M. Violette, to relieve her of her embarrassment, replied so awkwardly that they all exclaimed, "Now, then, that is cheating!" With what naïve grace and bashful coquetry she served the tea, going from one table to another, cup in hand, followed by the one-armed captain with silver epaulets, carrying the plum-cake! In order to see her again, M. Violette paid the captain visit after visit. But the greater part of the time he saw only the old soldier, who told him of his victories and conquests, of the attack of the redoubt at Borodino, and the frightful swearing of the dashing Murat, King of Naples, as he urged the squadrons on to the rescue. At last, one beautiful Sunday in autumn, he found himself alone with the young girl in the private garden of the veteran of the Old Guard. He seated himself beside Lucie on a stone bench: he told her his love, with the profound gaze of the Little Corporal, in bronzed plaster, resting upon them; and, full of delicious confusion, she replied, "Speak to mamma," dropping her bewildered eyes and gazing at the bed of china-asters, whose boxwood border traced the form of a cross of the Legion of Honor.

And all this was effaced, lost forever! The captain was dead; Lucie's mother was dead, and Lucie herself, his beloved Lucie, was dead, after giving him six years of cloudless happiness.

Certainly, he would never marry again. Oh, never!

No woman had ever existed or ever would exist for him but his poor darling, sleeping in the Montparnasse Cemetery, whose grave he visited every Sunday with a little watering-pot concealed under his coat.

He recalled, with a shiver of disgust, how, a few months after Lucie's death, one stifling evening in July, he was seated upon a bench in the Luxembourg, listening to the drums beating a retreat under the trees, when a woman came and took a seat beside him and looked at him steadily. Surprised by her significant look, he replied, to the question that she addressed to him, timidly and at the same time boldly: "So this is the way that you take the air?" And when she ended by asking him, "Come to my house," he had followed her. But he had hardly entered when the past all came back to him, and he felt a stifled feeling of distress. Falling into a chair, he sobbed, burying his face in his hands. His grief was so violent that, by a feminine instinct of pity, the wretched creature took his head in her arms, saying, in a consoling tone, "There, cry, cry, it will do you good!" and rocked him like an infant. At last he disengaged himself from this caress, which made him ashamed of himself, and throwing what little money he had about him upon the top of the bureau, he went away and returned to his home, where he went hastily to bed and wept to his heart's content, as he gnawed his pillow. Oh, horrible memories!

No! never a wife, no mistress, nothing! Now his grief was his wife, and lived with him.

The widower's morning awakening was frightful

above all things else—his awakening in the large bed that now had but one pillow. It was there that he had once had the exquisite pleasure of watching his dear Lucie every morning when asleep; for she did not like to get up early, and sometimes he had jokingly scolded her for it. What serenity upon this delicate, sweet face, with its closed eyes, nestling among her beautiful, disordered hair! How chaste this lovely young wife was in her unconstraint! She had thrown one of her arms outside of the covering, and the neck of her nightrobe, having slipped down, showed such a pure white shoulder and delicate neck. He leaned over the half-opened mouth, which exhaled a warm and living odor, something like the perfume of a flower, to inhale it, and a tender pride swept over him when he thought that she was his, his wife, this delicious creature who was almost a child yet, and that her heart was given to him forever. He could not resist it; he touched his young wife's lips with his own. She trembled under the kiss and opened her eyes, when the astonishment of the awakening was at once transformed into a happy smile as she met her husband's glance. Oh, blissful moment! But in spite of all, one must be sensible. He recalled that the milkmaid had left at daybreak her pot of milk at the door of their apartment; that the fire was not lighted, and that he must be at the office early, as the time for promotions was drawing near. Giving another kiss to the half-asleep Lucie, he said to her, in a coaxing tone, "Now then, Lucie, my child, it is half-past eight. Up, up with you, lazy little one!"

How could he console himself for such lost happiness? He had his son, yes—and he loved him very much—but the sight of Amédée increased M. Violette's grief; for the child grew to look more like his mother every day.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEMON ABSINTHE

THREE or four times a year M. Violette, accompanied by his son, paid a visit to an uncle of his deceased wife, whose heir Amédée might some day become.

M. Isidore Gaufre had founded and made successful a large house for Catholic books and pictures, to which he had added an important agency for the sale of all kinds of religious objects. This vast establishment was called, by a stroke of genius of its proprietor, "Bon Marché des Paroisses," and was famous among all the French clergy. At last it occupied the principal part of the house and all the out-buildings of an old hôtel on the Rue Servandoni, constructed in the pompous and magnificent style of the latter part of the seventeenth century. He did a great business there.

All day long, priests and clerical-looking gentlemen mounted the long flight of steps that led to a spacious first floor, lighted by large, high windows surmounted by grotesque heads. There the long-bearded missionaries came to purchase their cargoes of glass beads or imitation coral rosaries, before embarking for the East, or the Gaboon, to convert the negroes and the Chinese.

The member of the third estate, draped in a long chocolate-colored, straight frock-coat, holding a gigantic umbrella under his arm, procured, dirt cheap and by the thousand, pamphlets of religious tenets. The country curate, visiting Paris, arranged for the immediate delivery of a remonstrance, in electrotype, Byzantine style, signing a series of long-dated bills, contracting, by zeal supplemented by some ready cash, to fulfil his liabilities, through the generosity of the faithful ones.

There, likewise, a young director of consciences came to look for some devotional work—for example, the 12mo entitled "Widows' Tears Wiped Away," by St. François de Sales—for some penitent. The representative from some deputation from a devoutly Catholic district would solicit a reduction upon a purchase of the "Twelve Stations of the Cross," hideously daubed, which he proposed to present to the parishes which his adversaries had accused of being Voltairians. A brother of the Christian Doctrine, or a sister of St. Vincent de Paul, would bargain for catechisms for their schools. From time to time, even a prince of the church, a bishop with aristocratic mien, enveloped in an ample gown, with his hat surrounded with a green cord and golden tassels, would mysteriously shut himself up in M. Isidore Gaufre's office for an hour; and then would be reconducted to the top of the steps by the cringing proprietor, profuse with his "Monseigneur," and obsequiously bowing under the haughty benediction of two fingers in a violet glove.

It was certainly not from sympathy that M. Violette

had kept up his relations with his wife's uncle; for M. Gaufre, who was servilely polite to all those in whom he had an interest, was usually disdainful, sometimes even insolent, to those who were of no use to him. During his niece's life he had troubled himself very little about her, and had given her for a wedding present only an ivory crucifix with a shell for holy water, such as he sold by the gross to be used in convents. A self-made man, having already amassed—so they said—a considerable fortune, M. Gaufre held in very low estimation this poor devil of a commonplace employé whose slow advancement was doubtless due to the fact that he was lazy and incapable. From the greeting that he received, M. Violette suspected the poor opinion that M. Gaufre had of him. If he went there in spite of his natural pride it was only on his son's account. For M. Gaufre was rich, and he was not young. Perhaps—who could tell?—he might not forget Amédée, his nephew, in his will? It was necessary for him to see the child occasionally, and M. Violette, in pursuance of his paternal duty, condemned himself, three or four times a year, to the infliction of a visit at the "Bon Marché des Paroisses."

The hopes that M. Violette had formed as to his son's inheriting from M. Gaufre were very problematical; for the father, whom M. Gaufre had not been able to avoid receiving at his table occasionally, had been struck, even shocked, by the familiar and despotic tone of the old merchant's servant, a superb Normandy woman of about twenty-five years, answering to the royal name of Bérénice. The impertinent

ways of this robust woman betrayed her position in her master's house, as much as the diamonds that glittered in her ears. This creature would surely watch the will of her patron, a sexagenarian with an apoplectic neck, which became the color of dregs of wine after a glass of brandy.

M. Gaufre, although very practical and a churchwarden at St. Sulpice, had always had a taste for *liaisons*. His wife, during her life—he had been a widower for a dozen years—had been one of those unfortunate beings of whom people said, "That poor lady is to be pitied; she never can keep a servant." She had in vain taken girls from the provinces, without beauty and certified to be virtuous. One by one—a Flemish girl, an Alsatian, three Nivernaise, two from Picardy; even a young girl from Beauce, hired on account of her certificate as "the best-behaved girl in the village"—they were unsparingly devoured by the minotaur of the Rue Servandoni. All were turned out of doors, with a conscientious blow in the face, by the justly irritated spouse. When he became a widower he gave himself up to his *liaisons* in perfect security, but without scandal, of course, as to his passion for servants. New country-girls, wearing strange headdresses, responded favorably, in various *patois*, to his propositions. An Alsatian bow reigned six months; a Breton cap more than a year; but at last what must inevitably take place happened. The beautiful Bérénice definitely bound with fetters of iron the old libertine. She was now all-powerful in the house, where she reigned supreme through her beauty and her talent

for cooking; and as she saw her master's face grow more congested at each repast, she made her preparations for the future. Who could say but that M. Gaufre, a real devotee after all, would develop conscientious scruples some day, and end in a marriage, *in extremis?*

M. Violette knew all this; nevertheless it was important that Amédée should not be forgotten by his old relative, and sometimes, though rarely, he would leave his office a little earlier than usual, call for his son as he left the Batifol boarding-school, and take him to the Rue Servandoni.

The large drawing-rooms, transformed into a shop, where one could still see, upon forgotten panels, rococo shepherds offering doves to their shepherdesses, were always a new subject of surprise to little Amédée. After passing through the book-shop, where thousands of little volumes with figured gray and yellow covers crowded the shelves, and boys in écru linen blouses were rapidly tying up bundles, one entered the jewellery department. There, under beautiful glass cases, sparkled all the glittering display and showy luxury of the Church, golden tabernacles where the Paschal Lamb reposed in a flaming triangle, censers with quadruple chains, stoles and chasubles, heavy with embroidery, enormous candelabra, ostensories and drinking-cups incrusted with enamel and false precious stones—before all these splendors the child, who had read the *Arabian Nights*, believed that he had entered Aladdin's cave, or Aboul-Cassem's pit. From this glittering array one passed, without transition, into

the sombre *dépôt* of ecclesiastical vestments. Here all was black. One saw only piles of cassocks and pyramids of black hats. Two manikins, one clothed in a cardinal's purple robe, the other in episcopalian violet, threw a little color over the gloomy show.

But the large hall with painted statues amazed Amédée. They were all there, statues of all the saints in little chapels placed promiscuously upon the shelves in rows.

No more hierarchy. The Evangelist had for a neighbor a little Jesuit saint—an upstart of yesterday. The unfortunate Fourier had at his side the Virgin Mary. The Saviour of men elbowed St. Labre. They were of plaster run into moulds, or roughly carved in wood, and were colored with paint as glaring as the red and blue of a barber's pole, and covered with vulgar gildings. Chins in the air, ecstatic eyes shining with varnish, horribly ugly and all new, they were drawn up in line like recruits at the roll-call, the mitred bishop, the martyr carrying his palm, St. Agnes embracing her lamb, St. Roch with his dog and shells, St. John the Baptist in his sheepskin, and, most ridiculous of all, poor Vincent de Paul carrying three naked children in his arms, like a midwife's advertisement.

This frightful exhibition, which was of the nature of the Tussaud Museum or a masquerade, positively frightened Amédée. He had recently been to his first communion, and was still burning with the mystical fever, but so much ugliness offended his already fastidious taste and threw him into his first doubt.

One day, about five o'clock, M. Violette and his son

arrived at the "Bon Marché des Paroisses," and found Uncle Isidore in the room where the painted statues were kept, superintending the packing of a St. Michel. The last customer of the day was just leaving, the Bishop *in partibus* of Trebizonde, blessing M. Gaufre. The little apoplectic man, the giver of holy water, left alone with his clerks, felt under restraint no longer.

"Pay attention, you confounded idiot!" he cried to the young man just ready to lay the archangel in the shavings. "You almost broke the dragon's tail."

Then, noticing Amédée and M. Violette who had just entered:

"Ah! It is you, Violette! Good-day! Good-day, Amédée! You come at an unlucky time. It is shipping-day with us. I am in a great hurry—Eh! Monsieur Combier, by your leave, Monsieur Combier! Do not forget the three dozen of the *Apparition de la Salette* in stucco for Grenoble, with twenty-five per cent. reduction upon the bill. Are you working hard, Amédée? What do you say? He was first and assisted at the feast of St. Charlemagne! So much the better!—Jules, did you send the six chandeliers and the plated pyx and the Stations of the Cross, Number Two, to the Dames du Sacre-Cœur d'Alençons? What, not yet? But the order came three days ago! You must hurry, I tell you!—You can see, Violette, I am overflowing with work—but come in here a moment."

And once more ordering his bookkeeper, a captive in his glass case, to send the officers the notes that the

curé of Sourdeval had allowed to go to protest, Uncle Isidore ushered M. Violette and his son into his office.

It was an ancient room, and M. Gaufre, who aimed at the austere, had made it gloomier still by a safe, and black haircloth furniture, which looked as if taken from a vestry-room. The pretty, high, and oval apartment, with its large window, opening upon a garden, its ceiling painted in light rosy clouds, its woodwork ornamented with wreaths and quivers, still preserved some of the charm and elegance of former days. Amédée would have been amused there, had not Uncle Isidore, who had seated himself before his desk, launched at once an unkind question at M. Violette.

"By the way, have you obtained the promotion that you counted so much upon last year?"

"Unfortunately, no, Monsieur Gaufre. You know what the Administration is."

"Yes, it is slow; but you are not overwhelmed with work, however. While in a business like this—what cares, what annoyances! I sometimes envy you. You can take an hour to cut your pens. Well, what is wanted of me now?"

The head of a clerk with a pencil behind his ear, appeared through the half-open door.

"Monsieur le Superieur of Foreign Missions wishes to speak with Monsieur."

"You can see! Not one minute to myself. Another time, my dear Violette. Adieu, my little man—it is astonishing how much he grows to look like Lucie! You must come and dine with me some Sunday, without ceremony. Bérénice's *souffle au fromage* is

something delicious! Let Monsieur le Superieur come in."

M. Violette took his departure, displeased at his useless visit and irritated against Uncle Isidore, who had been hardly civil.

"That man is a perfect egotist," thought he, sadly; "and that girl has him in her clutches. My poor Amédée will have nothing from him."

Amédée himself was not interested in his uncle's fortune. He was just then a pupil in the fourth grade, which follows the same studies as at the Lycée Henri IV. Having suddenly grown tall, he was annoyed at wearing short trousers, and had already renounced all infantile games. The dangling crows which illustrated the pages of his Burnouf grammar were all dated the previous year, and he had entirely renounced feeding silkworms in his desk. Everything pointed to his not being a very practical man. Geometry disgusted him, and as for dates, he could not remember one. On holidays he liked to walk by himself through quiet streets; he read poems at the bookstalls, and lingered in the Luxembourg Gardens to see the sun set. Destined to be a dreamer and a sentimentalist—so much the worse for you, poor Amédée!

He went very often to the Gérards, but he no longer called his little friends "thou." Louise was now seventeen years old, thin, without color, and with a lank figure; decidedly far from pretty. People, in speaking of her, began to say, "She has beautiful eyes and is an excellent musician." Her sister Maria was twelve years old and a perfect little rosebud.

As to the neighbor's little girl, Rosine Combarieu, she had disappeared. One day the printer suddenly departed without saying a word to anybody, and took his child with him. The *concierge* said that he was concerned in some political plot, and was obliged to leave the house in the night. They believed him to be concealed in some small town.

Accordingly, Father Gérard was not angry with him for fleeing without taking leave of him. The conspirator had kept all his prestige in the eyes of the engraver, who, by a special run of ill-luck, was always engaged by a publisher of Bonapartist works, and was busy at that moment upon a portrait of the Prince Imperial, in the uniform of a corporal of the Guards, with an immense bearskin cap upon his childish head.

Father Gérard was growing old. His beard, formerly of a reddish shade, and what little hair there was remaining upon his head, had become silvery white; that wonderful white which, like a tardy recompense to red-faced persons, becomes their full-blooded faces so well. The good man felt the weight of years, as did his wife, whose flesh increased in such a troublesome way that she was forced to pant heavily when she seated herself after climbing the five flights. Father Gérard grew old, like everything that surrounded him; like the house opposite, that he had seen built, and that no longer had the air of a new building; like his curious old furniture, his mended crockery, and his engravings, yellow with age, the frames of which had turned red; like the old Erard piano, upon which Louise, an accomplished performer, now was playing

a set of Beethoven's waltzes and Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words." This poor old servant now had only the shrill, trembling tones of a harmonica.

The poor artist grew old, and he was uneasy as to the future; for he had not known how to manage like his school-friend, the intriguing Damourette, who had formerly cheated him out of the *prix de Rome* by a favor, and who now played the gentleman at the Institute, in his embroidered coat, and received all the good orders. He, the simpleton, had saddled himself with a family, and although he had drudged like a slave he had laid nothing aside. One day he might be stricken with apoplexy and leave his widow without resources, and his two daughters without a dowry. He sometimes thought of all this as he filled his pipe, and it was not pleasant.

If M. Gérard grew gloomy as he grew older, M. Violette became mournful. He was more than forty years old now. What a decline! Does grief make the years count double? The widower was a mere wreck. His rebellious lock of hair had become a dirty gray, and always hung over his right eye, and he no longer took the trouble to toss it behind his ear. His hands trembled and he felt his memory leaving him. He grew more taciturn and silent than ever, and seemed interested in nothing, not even in his son's studies. He returned home late, ate little at dinner, and then went out again with a tottering step to pace the dark, gloomy streets. At the office, where he still did his work mechanically, he was a doomed man; he never would be elected chief assistant. "What depravity!"

said one of his fellow clerks, a young man with a bright future, protected by the head of the department, who went to the races and had not his equal in imitating the "Gnouf! gnouf!" of Grassot, the actor. "A man of his age does not decline so rapidly without good cause. It is not natural!" What is it, then, that has reduced M. Violette to such a degree of dejection and wretchedness?

Alas! we must admit it. The unhappy man lacked courage, and he sought consolation in his despair, and found it in a vice.

Every evening when he left his office he went into a filthy little café on the Rue du Four. He would seat himself upon a bench in the back of the room, in the darkest corner, as if ashamed; and would ask in a low tone for his first glass of absinthe. His first! Yes, for he drank two, three even. He drank them in little sips, feeling slowly rise within him the cerebral rapture of the powerful liquor. Let those who are happy blame him if they will! It was there, leaning upon the marble table, looking at, without seeing her, through the pyramids of lump sugar and bowls of punch, the lady cashier with her well oiled hair reflected in the glass behind her—it was there that the inconsolable widower found forgetfulness of his trouble. It was there that for one hour he lived over again his former happiness.

For, by a phenomenon well known to drinkers of absinthe, he regulated and governed his intoxication, and it gave him the dream that he desired.

"Boy, one glass of absinthe!"

And once more he became the young husband, who adores his dear Lucie and is adored by her.

It is winter, he is seated in the corner by the fire, and before him, sitting in the light reflected by a green lamp-shade upon which dark silhouettes of jockey-riders are running at full speed, his wife is busying herself with some embroidery. Every few moments they look at each other and smile, he over his book and she over her work; the lover never tired of admiring Lucie's delicate fingers. She is too pretty! Suddenly he falls at her feet, slips his arm about her waist, and gives her a long kiss; then, overcome with languor, he puts his head upon his beloved's knees and hears her say to him, in a low voice: "That is right! Go to sleep!" and her soft hands lightly stroke his hair.

"Boy, one glass of absinthe!"

They are in that beautiful field filled with flowers, near the woods in Verrières, upon a fine June afternoon when the sun is low. She has made a magnificent bouquet of field flowers. She stops at intervals to add a cornflower, and he follows, carrying her mantle and umbrella. How beautiful is summer and how sweet it is to love! They are a little tired; for during the whole of this bright Sunday they have wandered through the meadows. It is the hour for dinner, and here is a little tavern under some lindens, where the whiteness of the napkins rivals the blossoming thickets. They choose a table and order their repast of a moustached youth. While waiting for their soup, Lucie, rosy from being out all day in the open air and silent from hunger, amuses herself in looking at the blue designs on the

plates, which represented battles in Africa. What a joyous dinner! There were mushrooms in the omelet, mushrooms in the stewed kidneys, mushrooms in the filet. But so much the better! They are very fond of them. And the good wine! The dear child is almost intoxicated at dessert! She takes it into her head to squeeze a cherry-stone between her thumb and first finger and makes it pop—slap!—into her husband's face! And the naughty creature laughs! But he will have his revenge—wait a little! He rises, and leaning over the table buries two fingers between her collar and her neck, and the mischievous creature draws her head down into her shoulders as far as she can, begging him, with a nervous laugh, "No, no, I beseech you!" for she is afraid of being tickled. But the best time of all is the return through the country at night, the exquisite odor of new-mown hay, the road lighted by a summer sky where the whole zodiac twinkles, and through which, like a silent stream, the *Chemin de St. Jacques* rolls its diamond smoke.

Tired and happy she hangs upon her husband's arm. How he loves her! It seems to him that his love for Lucie is as deep and profound as the night. "Nobody is coming—let me kiss your dear mouth!" and their kisses are so pure, so sincere, and so sweet, that they ought to rejoice the stars!

"Another glass of absinthe, boy—one more!"

And the unhappy man would forget for a few moments longer that he ought to go back to his lonely lodging, where the servant had laid the table some time before, and his little son awaited him, yawning

with hunger and reading a book placed beside his plate. He forgot the horrible moment of returning, when he would try to hide his intoxicated condition under a feint of bad humor, and when he would seat himself at table without even kissing Amédée, in order that the child should not smell his breath.

CHAPTER V

AMÉDÉE MAKES FRIENDS

EANWHILE the allegorical old fellow with the large wings and white beard, Time, had emptied his hour-glass many times; or, to speak plainer, the postman, with a few flakes of snow upon his blue cloth coat, presents himself three or four times a day at his customers' dwelling to offer in return for a trifling sum of money a calendar containing necessary information, such as the ecclesiastical computation, or the difference between the Gregorian and the Arabic Hegira; and Amédée Violette had gradually become a young man.

A young man! that is to say, a being who possesses a treasure without knowing its value, like a Central African negro who picks up one of M. Rothschild's cheque-books; a young man ignorant of his beauty or charms, who frets because the light down upon his chin has not turned into hideous bristles, a young man who awakes every morning full of hope, and artlessly asks himself what fortunate thing will happen to him to-day; who dreams, instead of living, because he is timid and poor.

It was then that Amédée made the acquaintance of

one of his comrades—he no longer went to M. Batifol's boarding-school, but was completing his studies at the Lycée Henri IV—named Maurice Roger. They soon formed an affectionate intimacy, one of those eighteen-year-old friendships which are perhaps the sweetest and most substantial in the world.

Amédée was attracted, at first sight, by Maurice's handsome, blond, curly head, his air of frankness and superiority, and the elegant jackets that he wore with the easy, graceful manners of a gentleman. Twice a day, when they left the college, they walked together through the Luxembourg Gardens, confiding to each other their dreams and hopes, lingering in the walks, where Maurice already gazed at the grisettes in an impudent fashion, talking with the charming abandon of their age, the sincere age when one thinks aloud.

Maurice told his new friend that he was the son of an officer killed before Sebastopol, that his mother had never married again, but adored him and indulged him in all his whims. He was patiently waiting for his school-days to end, to live independently in the Latin Quarter, to study law, without being hurried, since his mother wished him to do so, and he did not wish to displease her. But he wished also to amuse himself with painting, at least as an amateur; for he was passionately fond of it. All this was said by the handsome, aristocratic young man with a happy smile, which expanded his sensual lips and nostrils; and Amédée admired him without one envious thought; feeling, with the generous warmth of youth, an entire confidence in the future and the mere joy of living. In his

turn he made a confidant of Maurice, but not of everything. The poor boy could not tell anybody that he suspected his father of a secret vice, that he blushed over it, was ashamed of it, and suffered from it as much as youth can suffer. At least, honest-hearted fellow that he was, he avowed his humble origin without shame, boasted of his humble friends the Gérards, praised Louise's goodness, and spoke enthusiastically of little Maria, who was just sixteen and so pretty.

"You will take me to see them some time, will you not?" said Maurice, who listened to his friend with his natural good grace. "But first of all, you must come to dinner some day with me, and I will present you to my mother. Next Sunday, for instance. Is it agreeable?"

Amédée would have liked to refuse, for he suddenly recalled—oh! the torture and suffering of poor young men!—that his Sunday coat was almost as seedy as his everyday one, that his best pair of shoes were run-over at the heels, and that the collars and cuffs on his six white shirts were ragged on the edges from too frequent washings. Then, to go to dinner in the city, what an ordeal! What must he do to be presented in a drawing-room? The very thought of it made him shiver. But Maurice invited him so cordially that he was irresistible, and Amédée accepted.

The following Sunday, then, spruced up in his best —what could have possessed the haberdasher to induce him to buy a pair of red dog-skin gloves? He soon saw that they were too new and too startling for the rest of his costume—Amédée went up to the first floor of a fine house on the Faubourg St. Honoré and rang

gently at the door on the left. A young and pretty maid—one of those brunettes who have a waist that one can clasp in both hands, and a suspicion of a moustache—opened the door and ushered the young man into a drawing-room furnished in a simple but luxurious manner. Maurice was alone, standing with his back to the fire, in the attitude of master of the house. He received his friend with warm demonstrations of pleasure. Amédée's eyes were at once attracted by the portrait of a handsome lieutenant of artillery, dressed in the regimental coat, with long skirts, of 1845, and wearing a sword-belt fastened by two lion's heads. This officer, in parade costume, was painted in the midst of a desert, seated under a palm-tree.

"That is my father," said Maurice. "Do I not resemble him?"

The resemblance was really striking. The same warm, pleasant smile, and even the same blond curls. Amédée was admiring it when a voice repeated behind him, like an echo:

"Maurice resembles him, does he not?"

It was Madame Roger who had quietly entered. When Amédée saw this stately lady in mourning, with a Roman profile, and clear, white complexion, who threw such an earnest glance at her son, then at her husband's portrait, Amédée comprehended that Maurice was his mother's idol, and, moved by the sight of the widow, who would have been beautiful but for her gray hair and eyelids, red from so much weeping, he stammered a few words of thanks for the invitation to dinner.

"My son has told me," said she, "that you are the one among all his comrades that he cares for most. I know what affection you have shown him. I am the one who should thank you, Monsieur Amédée."

They seated themselves and talked; every few moments these words were spoken by Madame Roger with an accent of pride and tenderness, "My son . . . my son Maurice." Amédée realized how pleasant his friend's life must be with such a good mother, and he could not help comparing his own sad childhood, recalling above all things the lugubrious evening repasts, when, for several years now, he had buried his nose in his plate so as not to see his father's drunken eyes always fastened upon him as if to ask for his pardon.

Maurice let his mother praise him for a few moments, looking at her with a pleasant smile which became a trifle saddened. Finally he interrupted her:

"It is granted, mamma, that I am a perfect phœnix," and he gayly embraced her.

At this moment the pretty maid announced, "Monsieur and Mesdemoiselles Lantz," and Madame Roger arose hastily to receive the newcomers. Lieutenant-Colonel Lantz, of the Engineer Corps, was with Captain Roger when he died in the trench before Mamelon Vert; and might have been at that time pleasant to look upon, in his uniform with its black velvet breastplate; but, having been promoted some time ago to the office, he had grown aged, leaning over the plans and draughts on long tables covered with rules and compasses. With a cranium that looked like a picked bird, his gray, melancholy imperial, his stoop-

ing shoulders, which shortened still more his tightly buttoned military coat, there was nothing martial in his appearance. With his head full of whims, no fortune, and three daughters to marry, the poor Colonel, who put on only two or three times a year, for official solemnities, his uniform, which he kept in camphor, dined every Sunday night with Madame Roger, who liked this estimable man because he was her husband's best friend, and had invited him with his three little girls, who looked exactly alike, with their turned-up noses, florid complexions, and little, black, bead-like eyes, always so carefully dressed that one involuntarily compared them to three pretty cakes prepared for some wedding or festive occasion. They sat down at the table.

Madame Roger employed an excellent cook, and for the first time in his life Amédée ate a quantity of good things, even more exquisite than Mamma Gérard's little fried dishes. It was really only a very comfortable and nice dinner, but to the young man it was a revelation of unsuspected pleasures. This decorated table, this cloth that was so soft when he put his hand upon it; these dishes that excited and satisfied the appetite; these various flavored wines which, like the flowers, were fragrant—what new and agreeable sensations! They were quickly and silently waited upon by the pretty maid. Maurice, seated opposite his mother, presided over the repast with his elegant gayety. Madame Roger's pale face would light up with a smile at each of his good-natured jokes, and the three young ladies would burst into discreet little laughs, all in

unison, and even the sorrowful Colonel would arouse from his torpor.

He became animated after his second glass of burgundy, and was very entertaining. He spoke of the Crimean campaign; of that chivalrous war when the officers of both armies, enemies to each other, exchanged politenesses and cigars during the suspension of arms. He told fine military anecdotes, and Madame Roger, seeing her son's face excited with enthusiasm at these heroic deeds, became gloomy at once. Maurice noticed it first.

"Take care, Colonel," said he. "You will frighten mamma, and she will imagine at once that I still wish to enter Saint-Cyr. But I assure you, little mother, you may be tranquil. Since you wish it, your respectful and obedient son will become a lawyer without clients, who will paint daubs during his spare moments. In reality, I should much prefer a horse and a sword and a squadron of hussars. But no matter! The essential thing is not to give mamma any trouble."

This was said with so much warmth and gentleness, that Madame Roger and the Colonel exchanged softened looks; the young ladies were also moved, as much as pastry can be, and they all fixed upon Maurice their little black eyes, which had suddenly become so soft and tender that Amédée did not doubt but that they all had a sentimental feeling for Maurice, and thought him very fortunate to have the choice between three such pretty pieces for dessert.

How all loved this charming and graceful Maurice, and how well he knew how to make himself beloved!

Later, when they served the champagne, he arose, glass in hand, and delivered a burlesque toast, finding some pleasant word for all his guests. What frank gayety! what a hearty laugh went around the table! The three young ladies giggled themselves as red as peonies. A sort of joyous chuckle escaped from the Colonel's drooping moustache. Madame Roger's smile seemed to make her grow young; and Amédée noticed, in a corner of the dining-room, the pretty maid, who restrained herself no more than the others; and when she showed her teeth, that were like a young puppy's, she was charming indeed.

After the tea the Colonel, who lived at some distance, near the Military School, and who, as the weather was fine, wished to walk home and avoid the expense of a cab, left with his three marriageable daughters, and Amédée in his turn took his departure.

In the ante-chamber, the maid said to Maurice, as she helped him on with his topcoat.

"I hope that you will not come in very late this evening, Monsieur Maurice."

"What is that, Suzanne?" replied the young man, without anger, but a trifle impatiently. "I shall return at the hour that pleases me."

As he descended the stairs ahead of Amédée, he said, with a laugh:

"Upon my word! she will soon make her jealousy public."

"What!" exclaimed Amédée, glad that his companion could not see his blushes.

"Well, yes! Is she not pretty? I admit it, Violette;

I have not, like you, the artlessness of the flower whose name you bear. You will have to resign yourself to it; you have a very bad fellow for a friend. As to the rest, be content. I have resolved to scandalize the family roof no longer. I have finished with this bold-faced creature. You must know that she began it, and was the first to kiss me on the sly. Now, I am engaged elsewhere. Here we are outside, and here is a carriage. Here, driver! You will allow me to bid you adieu. It is only a quarter past ten. I still have time to appear at Bullier's and meet Zoé Mirilton. Until to-morrow, Violette."

Amédée returned home very much troubled. So, then, his friend was a libertine. But he made excuses for him. Had he not just seen him so charming to his mother and so respectful to the three young ladies? Maurice had allowed himself to be carried away by his youthful impetuosity, that was all! Was it for him, still pure, but tormented by the temptations and curiosity of youth, to be severe? Would he not have done as much had he dared, or if he had had the money in his pocket? To tell the truth, Amédée dreamed that very night of the pretty maid with the suspicion of a moustache.

The next day, when Amédée paid his visit to the Gérards, all they could talk of was the evening before. Amédée spoke with the eloquence of a young man who had seen for the first time a finger-bowl at dessert.

Louise, while putting on her hat and getting her roll of music—she gave lessons now upon the piano in boarding-schools—was much interested in Madame

Roger's imposing beauty. Mamma Gérard would have liked to know how the chicken-jelly was made; the old engraver listened with pleasure to the Colonel's military anecdotes; while little Maria exacted a precise description of the toilettes of the three demoiselles Lantz, and turned up her nose disdainfully at them.

"Now, then, Amédée," said the young girl, suddenly, as she looked at herself in a mirror that was covered with fly-specks, "tell me honestly, were these young ladies any prettier than I?"

"Do you see the coquette?" exclaimed Father Gérard, bursting into laughter without raising his eyes from his work. "Do people ask such questions as that, Mademoiselle?"

There was a general gayety, but Amédée blushed without knowing why. Oh! no, certainly those three young ladies in their Savoy-cake skirts and nougat waists were not as pretty as little Maria in her simple brown frock. How she improved from day to day! It seemed to Amédée as if he never had seen her before until this minute. Where had she found that supple, round waist, that mass of reddish hair which she twisted upon the top of her head, that lovely complexion, that mouth, and those eyes that smiled with the artless tenderness of young flowers?

Mamma Gérard, while laughing like the others, scolded her daughter a little for her attack of feminine vanity, and then began to talk of Madame Roger in order to change the conversation.

Amédée did not cease to praise his friend. He told how affectionate he was to his mother, how he

resisted the military blood that burned in him, how graceful he was, and how, at eighteen years, he did the honor of the drawing-room and table with all the manner of a grand seigneur.

Maria listened attentively.

"You have promised to bring him here, Amédée," said the spoiled child, with a serious air. "I should like very much to see him once."

Amédée repeated his promise; but on his way to the Lycée, for his afternoon class, he recalled the incident of the pretty maid and the name of Zoé Mirilton, and, seized with some scruples, he asked himself whether he ought to introduce his friend to the young Gérard girls. At first this idea made him uneasy, then he thought that it was ridiculous. Was not Maurice a good-hearted young man and well brought up? Had he not seen him conduct himself with tact and reserve before Colonel Lantz's daughters?

Some days later Maurice reminded him of the promised visit to the Gérards, and Amédée presented him to his old friends.

Louise was not at home; she had been going about teaching for some time to increase the family's resources, for the engraver was more red-faced than ever, and obliged to change the number of his spectacles every year, and could not do as much work as formerly.

But the agreeable young man made a conquest of the rest of the family by his exquisite good-nature and cordial, easy manner. Respectful and simple with Madame Gérard, whom he intimidated a little, he paid very little attention to Maria and did not appear to

notice that he was exciting her curiosity to the highest pitch. He modestly asked Father Gérard's advice upon his project of painting, amusing himself with the knickknacks about the apartments, picking out by instinct the best engravings and canvases of value. The good man was enchanted with Maurice and hastened to show him his private museum, forgetting all about his pipe—he was smoking at present a Garibaldi—and presented him his last engraving, where one saw—it certainly was a fatality that pursued the old republican!—the Emperor Napoleon III, at Magenta, motionless upon his horse in the centre of a square of grenadiers, cut down by grape and canister.

Maurice's visit was short, and as Amédée had thought a great deal about little Maria for several days, he asked his friend, as he conducted him a part of the way:

"What did you think of her?"

Maurice simply replied, "Delicious!" and changed the conversation.

CHAPTER VI

DREAMS OF LOVE

A SOLEMN moment approached for the two friends. They were to take their examinations for graduation. Upon the days when M. Violette—they now called him at the office "Father Violette," he had grown so aged and decrepit—was not too much "consoled" in the café in the Rue du Four, and when he was less silent and gloomy than usual, he would say to his son, after the soup:

"Do you know, Amédée, I shall not be easy in my mind until you have received your degree. Say what they may, it leads to everything."

To everything indeed! M. Violette had a college friend upon whom all the good marks had been showered, who, having been successively schoolmaster, journalist, theatrical critic, a boarder in Mazas prison, insurance agent, director of an athletic ring—he quoted Homer in his harangue—at present pushed back the curtains at the entrance to the Ambigu, and waited for his soup at the barracks gate, holding out an old tomato-can to be filled.

But M. Violette had no cause to fear! Amédée received his degree on the same day with his friend

Maurice, and both passed honorably. A little old man with a head like a baboon—the scientific examiner—tried to make Amédée flounder on the subject of nitrogen, but he passed all the same. One can hope for everything nowadays.

But what could Amédée hope for first? M. Violette thought of it when he was not at his station at the Rue du Four. What could he hope for? Nothing very great.

Probably he could enter the ministry as an auxiliary. One hundred francs a month, and the gratuities, would not be bad for a beginner! M. Violette recalled his endless years in the office, and all the trouble he had taken to guess a famous rebus that was celebrated for never having been solved. Was Amédée to spend his youth deciphering enigmas? M. Violette hoped for a more independent career for his son, if it were possible. Commerce, for example! Yes! there was a future in commerce. As a proof of it there was the grocer opposite him, a simpleton who probably did not put the screws on enough and had just hanged himself rather than go into bankruptcy. M. Violette would gladly see his son in business. If he could begin with M. Gaufre? Why not? The young man might become in the end his uncle's partner and make his fortune. M. Violette spoke of it to Amédée.

"Shall we go to see your uncle Sunday morning?"

The idea of selling chasubles and Stations of the Cross did not greatly please Amédée, who had concealed in his drawer a little book full of sonnets, and had in his mind the plan of a romantic drama wherein

one would say "Good heavens!" and "My lord!" But first of all, he must please his father. He was glad to observe that for some time M. Violette had interested himself more in him, and had resisted his baneful habit somewhat. The young man offered no resistance. The next day at noon he presented himself at the Rue Servandoni, accompanied by his father.

The "dealer in pious goods" received them with great good-humor. He had just come from high mass and was about to sit down at the table. He even invited them to follow his example and taste of his stewed kidneys, one of Bérénice's triumphs, who served the dinner with her hands loaded with rings. The Violettes had dined, and the father made known his desire.

"Yes," said Uncle Isidore, "Amédée might enter the house. Only you know, Violette, it will be another education to be learned over again. He must begin at the very beginning and follow the regular course. Oh! the boy will not be badly treated! He may take his meals with us, is not that so, Bérénice? At first he would be obliged to run about a little, as I did when I came from the province to work in the shop and tie up parcels."

M. Violette looked at his son and saw that he was blushing with shame. The poor man understood his mistake. What good to have dazzled M. Patin before the whole University by reciting, without hesitation, three verses of Aristophanes, only to become a drudge and a packer? Well! so Amédée would yawn over green boxes and guess at enigmas in the *Illustration*. It had to be so.

They took leave of Uncle Isidore.

"We will reflect over it, Monsieur Gaufre, and will come to see you again."

But Bérénice had hardly shut the door upon them when M. Violette said to his son:

"Nothing is to be expected of that old egotist. Tomorrow we will go to see the chief of my department, I have spoken of you to him, at all events."

He was a good sort of fellow, this M. Courtet, who was head clerk, though too conceited and starched up, certainly. His red rosette, as large as a fifty-cent piece, made one's eyes blink, and he certainly was very imprudent to stand so long backed up to the fireplace with limbs spread apart, for it seemed that he must surely burn the seat of his trousers. But no matter, he has stomach enough. He has noticed M. Violette's pitiful decline—"a poor devil who never will live to be promoted." Having it in his power to distribute positions, M. Courtet had reserved a position for Amédée. In eight days the young man would be nominated an auxiliary employé at fifteen hundred francs a year. It is promised and done.

Ugh! the sickening heat from the stove! the disgusting odor of musty papers! However, Amédée had nothing to complain of; they might have given him figures to balance for five hours at a time. He owed it to M. Courtet's kindness, that he was put at once into the correspondence room. He studied the formulas, and soon became skilful in official politeness. He now knew the delicate shades which exist between "yours respectfully" and "most respectfully yours;"

and he measured the abyss which separates an "agreeable" and "homage."

To sum it all up, Amédée was bored, but he was not unhappy; for he had time to dream.

He went the longest way to the office in the morning, while seeking to make "amour" rhyme with "jour" without producing an insipid thing; or else he thought of the third act of his drama after the style of 1830, and the grand love scene which should take place at the foot of the Montfaucon gallows. In the evening he went to the Gérards, and they seated themselves around the lamp which stood on the dining-room table, the father reading his journal, the women sewing. He chatted with Maria, who answered him the greater part of the time without raising her eyes, because she suspected, the coquette! that he admired her beautiful, drooping lids.

Amédée composed his first sonnets in her honor, and he adored her, of course, but he was also in love with the Lantz young ladies, whom he saw sometimes at Madame Roger's, and who each wore Sunday evenings roses in her hair, which made them resemble those pantheons in sponge-cake that pastry-cooks put in their windows on *fête* days.

If Amédée had been presented to twelve thousand maidens successively, they would have inspired twelve thousand wishes. There was the servant of the family on the first floor, whose side-glance troubled him as he met her on the staircase; and his heart sank every time he turned the handle of the door of a shop in the Rue Bonaparte, where an insidious clerk always forced him

to choose ox-colored kid gloves, which he detested. It must not be forgotten that Amédée was very young, and was in love with love.

He was so extremely timid that he never had had the audacity to tell the girl at the glove counter that he preferred bronze-green gloves, nor the boldness to show Maria Gérard his poems composed in her honor, in which he now always put the plural "amours," so as to make it rhyme with "toujours," which was an improvement. He never had dared to reply to the glance of the little maid on the second floor; and he was very wrong to be embarrassed, for one morning, as he passed the butcher's shop, he saw the butcher's foreman put his arm about the girl's waist and whisper a love speech over a fine sirloin roast.

Sometimes, in going or coming from the office, Amédée would go to see his friend Maurice, who had obtained from Madame Roger permission to install himself in the Latin Quarter so as to be near the law school.

In a very low-studded first-floor room in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, Amédée perceived through a cloud of tobacco-smoke the elegant Maurice in a scarlet jacket lying upon a large divan. Everything was rich and voluptuous, heavy carpets, handsomely bound volumes of poems, an open piano, and an odor of perfumery mingled with that of cigarettes. Upon the velvet-covered mantel Mademoiselle Irma, the favorite of the master of the apartment, had left the last fashionable novel, marking, with one of her hairpins, where she had left off reading. Amédée spent a delightful hour

there. Maurice always greeted him with his joyful, kind manner, in which one hardly minded the slight shade of patronage. He walked up and down his room, expanding his finely moulded chest, lighting and throwing away his cigarettes, seating himself for two minutes at the piano and playing one of Chopin's sad strains, opening a book and reading a page, showing his albums to his friend, making him repeat some of his poems, applauding him and touching lightly upon different subjects, and charming Amédée more and more by his grace and manners.

However, Amédée could not enjoy his friend much, as he rarely found him alone. Every few moments—the key was in the door—Maurice's comrades, young pleasure-seekers like himself, but more vulgar, not having his gentlemanly bearing and manners, would come to talk with him of some projected scheme or to remind him of some appointment for the evening.

Often, some one of them, with his hat upon his head, would dash off a polka, after placing his lighted cigar upon the edge of the piano. These fast fellows frightened Amédée a little, as he had the misfortune to be fastidious.

After these visitors had left, Maurice would ask his friend to dinner, but the door would open again, and Mademoiselle Irma, in her furs and small veil—a comical little face—would enter quickly and throw her arms about Amédée's neck, kissing him, while rumpling his hair with her gloved hands.

"Bravo! we will all three dine together."

No! Amédée is afraid of Mademoiselle Irma, who

has already thrown her mantle upon the sofa and crowned the bronze Venus de Milo with her otter toque. The young man excuses himself, he is expected at home.

"Timid fellow, go!" said Maurice to him, as he conducted him to the door, laughing.

What longings! What dreams! They made up all of poor Amédée's life. Sometimes they were sad, for he suffered in seeing his father indulge himself more and more in his vice. No woman loved him, and he never had one louis in his pocket for pleasure or liberty. But he did not complain. His life was noble and happy! He smiled with pleasure as he thought of his good friends; his heart beat in great throbs as he thought of love; he wept with rapture over beautiful verses. The spectacle of life, through hope and the ideal, seemed to him transfigured. Happy Amédée! He was not yet twenty years old!

CHAPTER VII

A GENTLE COUNSELLOR

ONE sombre, misty, winter morning, as Amédée lingered in his bed, his father entered, bringing him a letter that the wife of the *concierge* had just brought up. The letter was from Maurice, inviting his friend to dinner that evening at seven o'clock at Foyots, to meet some of his former companions at the Lycée Henri IV.

"Will you excuse me for not dining with you this evening, papa?" said Amédée, joyfully. "Maurice Roger entertains us at a restaurant."

The young man's gayety left him suddenly when he looked at his father, who had seated himself on the side of the bed. He had become almost frightful to look at; old before his time, livid of complexion, his eyes bloodshot, the rebellious lock of hair straggling over his right temple. Nothing was more heartbreaking than his senile smile when he placed his bony trembling hands upon his thighs. Amédée, who knew, alas, why his father had reached such a pass, felt his heart moved with pity and shame.

"Are you suffering to-day?" asked the young man. "Would you prefer that we should dine together as

usual? I will send word to Maurice. Nothing is easier."

"No, my child, no!" replied M. Violette, in a hollow tone. "Go and amuse yourself with your friends. I know perfectly well that the life you lead with me is too monotonous. Go and amuse yourself, it will please me—only there is an idea that troubles me more than usual—and I want to confide it to you."

"What is it then, dear papa?"

"Amédée, last March your mother had been dead fifteen years. You hardly knew her. She was the sweetest and best of creatures, and all that I can wish you is, that you may meet such a woman, make her your companion for life, and be more fortunate than I, my poor Amédée, and keep her always. During these frightful years since your mother's death I have suffered, do you see? suffered horribly, and I have never, never been consoled. If I have lived—if I have had the strength to live, in spite of all, it was only for you and in remembrance of her. I think I have nearly finished my task. You are a young man, intelligent and honest, and you have now an employment which will give you your bread. However, I often ask myself—oh, very often—whether I have fulfilled my duty toward you. Ah! do not protest," added the unhappy man, whom Amédée had clasped in his arms. "No, my poor child, I have not loved you sufficiently; grief has filled too large a place in my heart; above all, during these last few years I have not been with you enough. I have sought solitude. You understand me, Amédée, I can not tell you more," he said, with a

sob. "There are some parts of my life that you must ignore, and if it grieves you to know what I have become during that time, you must never think of it; forget it. I beg of you, my child, do not judge me severely. And one of these days, if I die—ah! we must expect it—the burden of my grief is too heavy for me to bear, it crushes me! Well, my child, if I die, promise me to be indulgent to my memory, and when you think of your father only say: 'He was very unhappy!'"

Amédée shed tears upon his father's shoulder, who softly stroked his son's beautiful hair with his trembling hands.

"My father, my good father!" sobbed Amédée, "I love and respect you with all my heart. I will dress myself quickly and we will go to the office together; we will return the same way and dine like a pair of good friends. I beg of you, do not ask me to leave you to-day!"

But M. Violette suddenly arose as if he had formed some resolution.

"No, Amédée," said he, firmly. "I have said what I had to say to you, and you will remember it. That is sufficient. Go and amuse yourself this evening with your friends. Sadness is dangerous at your age. As for myself, I shall go to dine with Père Bastide, who has just received his pension, and has invited me more than twenty times to come and see his little house at Grand Montrouge. It is understood; I wish it. Now then, wipe your eyes and kiss me."

Having tenderly embraced his son, M. Violette left

the room. Amédée could hear him in the vestibule take down his hat and cane, open and close the door, and go down the stairs with a heavy step. A quarter of an hour after, as the young man was crossing the Luxembourg to go to the office, he met Louise Gérard with her roll of music in her hand, going to give some lessons in the city. He walked a few steps beside her, and the worthy girl noticed his red eyes and disturbed countenance.

"What is the matter with you, Amédée?" she inquired, anxiously.

"Louise," he replied, "do you not think that my father has changed very much in the last few months?"

She stopped and looked at him with eyes shining with compassion.

"Very much changed, my poor Amédée. You would not believe me if I told you that I had not remarked it. But whatever may be the cause—how shall I say it?—that has affected your father's health, you should think of only one thing, my friend; that is, that he has been tender and devoted to you; that he became a widower very young and he did not remarry; that he has endured, in order to devote himself to his only child, long years of solitude and unhappy memories. You must think of that, Amédée, and that only."

"I never shall forget it, Louise, never fear; my heart is full of gratitude. This morning, even, he was so affectionate and kind to me—but his health is ruined; he is now a weak old man. Soon—I not only fear it, but I am certain of it—soon he will be incapable

of work. I can see his poor hands tremble now. He will not even have a right to a pension. If he could not continue to work in the office he could hardly obtain a meagre relief, and that by favor only. And for long years I can only hope for an insufficient salary. Oh! to think that the catastrophe draws near, that one of these days he may fall ill and become infirm, perhaps, and that we shall be almost needy and I shall be unable to surround him with care in his old age. That is what makes me tremble!"

They walked along side by side upon the moist, soft ground of the large garden, under the leafless trees, where hung a slight penetrating mist which made them shiver under their wraps.

"Amédée," said she, looking at the young man with a serious gentleness, "I have known you from a child, and I am the elder. I am twenty-two; that makes me almost an old maid, Amédée, and gives me the right to scold you a little. You lack confidence in life, my friend, and it is wrong at your age. Do you think I do not see that my father has aged very much, that his eyesight fails, that we are much more cramped in circumstances in the house than formerly? Are we any the more sad? Mamma makes fewer little dishes and I teach in Paris, that is all. We live nearly the same as before, and our dear Maria—she is the pet of us all, the joy and pride of the house—well, our Maria, all the same, has from time to time a new frock or a pretty hat. I have no experience, but it seems to me that in order to feel really unhappy I must have nobody to love—that is the only privation worth the trouble of

noticing. Do you know that I have just had one of the greatest pleasures of my life? I noticed that papa did not smoke as much as usual, in order to be economical, poor man! Fortunately I found a new pupil at Batignolles, and as soon as I had the first month's pay in my pocket I bought a large package of tobacco and put it beside his work. One must never complain so long as one is fortunate enough to keep those one loves. I know the secret grief that troubles you regarding your father; but think what he has suffered, that he loves you, that you are his only consolation. And when you have gloomy thoughts, come and see your old friends, Amédée. They will try to warm your heart at the fireside of their friendship, and to give you some of their courage, the courage of poor people which is composed of a little indifference and a little resignation."

They had reached the Florentine Terrace, where stand the marble statues of queens and ladies, and on the other side of the balustrade, ornamented with large vases, they could see through the mist the reservoir with its two swans, the solitary gravel walks, the empty grass-plots of a pale green, surrounded by the skeletons of lilac-trees, and the façade of the old palace, whose clock-hands pointed to ten.

"Let us hasten," said Louise, after a glance at the dial. "Escort me as far at the Odéon omnibus. I am a little late."

As he walked by her side he looked at her. Alas! Poor Louise was not pretty, in spite of her large eyes, so loving but not coquettish. She wore a close, ugly

hat, a mantle drawn tightly about her shoulders, colored gloves, and heavy walking-shoes. Yes, she was a perfect picture of a "two francs an hour" music-teacher. What a good, brave girl! With what an overflowing heart she had spoken of her family! It was to earn tobacco for her father and a new frock for her pretty sister that she left thus, so early in the misty morning, and rode in public conveyances, or tramped through the streets of Paris in the mud. The sight of her, more than what she said, gave the weak and melancholy Amédée courage and desire for manly resolutions.

"My dear Louise," said he, with emotion, "I am very fortunate to have such a friend as you, and for so many years! Do you remember when we used to have our hunts after the bearskin cap when we were children?"

They had just left the garden and found themselves behind the Odéon. Two tired-out omnibus horses, of a yellowish-white, and showing their ribs, were rubbing their noses against each other like a caress; then the horse on the left raised his head and placed it in a friendly way upon the other's mane. Louise pointed to the two animals and said to Amédée, smilingly:

"Their fate is hard, is it not? No matter! they are good friends, and that is enough to help them endure it."

Then, shaking hands with Amédée, she climbed lightly up into the carriage.

All that day at the office Amédée was uneasy about his father, and about four o'clock, a little before the

time for his departure, he went to M. Violette's office. There they told him that his father had just left, saying that he would dine at Grand Montrouge with an old friend; and Amédée, a trifle reassured, decided to rejoin his friend Maurice at the Foyot restaurant

CHAPTER VIII

BUTTERFLIES AND GRASSHOPPERS

MÉDÉE was the first to arrive at the rendezvous. He had hardly pronounced Maurice Roger's name when a voice like a cannon bellowed out, "Now then! the yellow parlor!" and he was conducted into a room where a dazzling table was laid by a young man, with a Yankee goatee and whiskers, and the agility of a prestidigitateur. This frisky person relieved Amédée at once of his hat and coat, and left him alone in the room, radiant with lighted candles.

Evidently it was to be a banquet. Piled up in the centre of the table was a large dish of crayfish, and at each plate—there were five—were groups of large and small glasses.

Maurice came in almost immediately, accompanied by his other guests, three young men dressed in the latest fashion, whom Amédée did not at first recognize as his former comrades, who once wore wrinkled stockings and seedy coats, and wore out with him the seats of their trousers on the benches of the Lycée Henri IV.

After the greetings, "What! is it you?" "Do you remember me?" and a shaking of hands, they all seated themselves around the table.

What! is that little dumpy fellow with the turned-up nose, straight as an arrow and with such a satisfied air, Gorju, who wanted to be an actor? He is one now, or nearly so, since he studies with Regnier at the Conservatoire. A make-believe actor, he puts on airs, and in the three minutes that he has been in the room he has looked at his retroussé nose and his coarse face, made to be seen from a distance, ten times in the mirror. His first care is to inform Amédée that he has renounced his name Gorju, which was an impossible one for the theatre, and has taken that of Jocquelet. Then, without losing a moment, he refers to his "talents," "charms," and "physique."

Who is this handsome fellow with such neat side-whiskers, whose finely cut features suggest an intaglio head, and who has just placed a lawyer's heavy portfolio upon the sofa? It is Arthur Papillon, the distinguished Latin scholar who wished to organize a debating society at the Lycée, and to divide the rhetoric class into groups and sub-groups like a parliament. "What have you been doing, Papillon?" Papillon had studied law, and was secretary of the Patru Conference, of course.

Amédée immediately recognized the third guest.

"What! Gustave!" exclaimed he, joyously.

Yes! Gustave, the former "dunce," the one they had called "Good-luck" because his father had made an immense fortune in guano. Not one bit changed was Gustave! The same deep-set eyes and greenish complexion. But what style! English from the tips of his pointed shoes to the horseshoe scarfpin in his

necktie. One would say that he was a horse-jockey dressed in his Sunday best. What was this comical Gustave doing now? Nothing. His father has made two hundred thousand pounds' income dabbling in certain things, and Gustave is getting acquainted with life, that is all—which means to wake up every morning toward noon, with a bitter mouth caused from the last night's supper, and to be surprised every morning at dawn at the baccarat table, after spending five hours saying "Bac!" in a stifled, hollow voice. Gustave understands life, and, taking into consideration his countenance like a death's-head, it may lead him to make the acquaintance of something entirely different. But who thinks of death at his age? Gustave wishes to know life, and when a fit of coughing interrupts him in one of his idiotic bursts of laughter, his comrades at the Gâteux Club tell him that he has swallowed the wrong way. Wretched Gustave, so be it!

Meanwhile the boy with the juggler's motions appeared with the soup, and made exactly the same gestures when he uncovered the tureen as Robert Houdin would have made, and one was surprised not to see a bunch of flowers or a live rabbit fly out. But no! it was simply soup, and the guests attacked it vigorously and in silence. After the Rhine wine all tongues were unloosened, and as soon as they had eaten the Normandy sole—oh! what glorious appetites at twenty years of age!—the five young men all talked at once. What a racket! Exclamations crossed one another like rockets. Gustave, forcing his weak voice, boasted of the performances of a "stepper"

that he had tried that morning in the Allée des Cavaliers. He would have been much better off had he stayed in his bed and taken cod-liver oil. Maurice called out to the boy to uncork the Château-Léoville. Amédée, having spoken of his drama to the comedian Gorju, called Jocquelet, that person, speaking in his bugle-like voice that came through his bugle-shaped nose, set himself up at once as a man of experience, giving his advice, and quoting, with admiration, Talma's famous speech to a dramatic poet: "Above all, no fine verses!" Arthur Papillon, who was destined for the courts, thought it an excellent time to lord it over the tumult of the assembly himself, and bleated out a speech of Jules Favre that he had heard the night before in the legislative assembly.

The timid Amédée was defeated at the start in this *mêlée* of conversation. Maurice also kept silent, with a slightly disdainful smile under his golden moustache, and an attack of coughing soon disabled Gustave. Alone, like two ships in line who let out, turn by turn, their volleys, the lawyer and the actor continued their cannonading. Arthur Papillon, who belonged to the Liberal opposition and wished that the Imperial government should come around to "a pacific and regular movement of parliamentary institutions," was listened to for a time, and explained, in a clear, full voice the last article in the *Courrier du Dimanche*. But, bursting out in his terrible voice, which seemed like all of Gideon's trumpets blowing at once, the comedian took up the offensive, and victoriously declared a hundred foolish things—saying, for example, that the part of

Alceste should be made a comic one; making fun of Shakespeare and Hugo, exalting Scribe, and in spite of his profile and hooked nose, which should have opened the doors of the Théâtre-Français and given him an equal share for life in its benefits, he affirmed that he intended to play lovers' parts, and that he meant to assume the responsibility of making "sympathetic" the *rôle* of Nero, in *Britannicus*.

This would have become terribly tiresome, but for the entrance upon the scene of some truffled partridges, which the juggler carved and distributed in less time than it would take to shuffle a pack of cards. He even served the very worst part of the bird to the simple Amédée, as he would force him to choose the nine of spades. Then he poured out the chambertin, and once more all heads became excited, and the conversation fell, as was inevitable, upon the subject of women.

Jocquelet began it, by speaking the name of one of the prettiest actresses in Paris. He knew them all and described them exactly, detailing their beauties like a slave-dealer.

"So little Lucille Prunelle is a friend of the great Moncontour——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Gustave, who was looking badly, "she has already left him for Cerfbeer the banker."

"I say she has not."

"I say that she has."

They would have quarrelled if Maurice, with his affable, bantering air, had not attacked Arthur Papillon on the subject of his love-affairs; for the young advo-

cate drank many cups of Orleanist tea, going even into the same drawing-rooms as Beule and Prevost-Paradol, and accompanying political ladies to the receptions at the Académie Française.

"That is where you must make havoc, you rascal!"

But Papillon defends himself with conceited smiles and meaning looks. According to him—and he puts his two thumbs into the armholes of his vest—the ambitious must be chaste.

"*Abstineo venere,*" said he, lowering his eyes in a comical manner, for he did not fear Latin quotations. However, he declared himself very hard to please in that matter; he dreamed of an Egeria, a superior mind. What he did not tell them was, that a dressmaker's little errand-girl, with whom he had tried to converse as he left the law-school, had surveyed him from head to foot and threatened him with the police.

Upon some new joke of Maurice's, the lawyer gave his amorous programme in the following terms:

"Understand me, a woman must be as intelligent as Hypatia, and have the sensibility of Héloise; the smile of a Joconde, and the limbs of an Antiope; and, even then, if she had not the throat of a Venus de Medicis, I should not love her."

Without going quite so far, the actor showed himself none the less exacting. According to his ideas, Déborah, the tragédienne at the Odéon—a Greek statue! —had too large hands, and the fascinating Blanche Pompon at the Variétés was a mere wax doll.

Gustave, after all, was the one who is most intractable; excited by the Bordeaux wine—a glass of min-

eral water would be best for him—he proclaimed that the most beautiful creature was agreeable to him only for one day; that it was a matter of principle, and that he had never made but one exception, in favor of the illustrious dancer at the Casino Cadet, Nina l'Auvergnate, because she was so comical! "Oh! my friends, she is so droll, she is enough to kill one!"

"To kill one!" Yes! my dear Monsieur Gustave, that is what will happen to you one of these fine mornings, if you do not decide to lead a more reasonable life—and on the condition that you pass your winters in the South, also!

Poor Amédée was in torture; all his illusions—desires and sentiments blended—were cruelly wounded. Then, he had just discovered a deplorable faculty; a new cause for being unhappy. The sight of this foolishness made him suffer. How these coarse young men lied! Gustave seemed to him a genuine idiot, Arthur Papillon a pedant, and as to Jocquelet, he was as unbearable as a large fly buzzing between the glass and the curtain of a nervous man's room. Fortunately, Maurice made a little diversion by bursting into a laugh.

"Well, my friends, you are all simpletons," he exclaimed. "I am not like you, thank fortune! I do not sputter over my soup. Long life to women! Yes, all of them, pretty and otherwise! For, upon my word, there are no ugly ones. I do not notice that Miss Keepsake has feet like the English, and I forget the barmaid's ruddy complexion, if she is attractive otherwise. Now do not talk in this stupid fashion, but

do as I do; nibble all the apples while you have teeth. Do you know the reason why, at the moment that I am talking to the lady of the house, I notice the nose of the pretty waitress who brings in a letter on a salver? Do you know the reason why, just as I am leaving Cydalize's house, who has put a rose in my buttonhole, that I turn my head at the passing of Margoton, who is returning from the market with a basket upon her arm? It is because it is one other of my children. One other! that is a great word! Yes, one thousand and three. Don Juan was right. I feel his blood coursing in my veins. And now the boy shall uncork some champagne, shall he not? to drink to the health of love!"

Maurice was cynical, but this exposition of his philosophy served a good purpose all the same. Everybody applauded him. The prestidigitateur, who moved about the table like a schoolboy in a monkey-house, drew the cork from a bottle of Roederer—it was astonishing that fireworks did not dart out of it—and good-humor was restored. It reigned noisily until the end of the repast, when the effect was spoiled by that fool of a Gustave. He insisted upon drinking three glasses of kümmel—why had they not poured in maple sirup?—and, imagining that Jocquelet looked at him askance, he suddenly manifested the intention of cutting his head open with the carafe. The comedian, who was very pale, recalled all the scenes of provocation that he had seen in the theatre; he stiffened in his chair, swelled out his chest, and stammered, "At your orders!" trying to "play the situation." But it was useless.

Gustave, restrained by Maurice and Amédée, and as drunk as a Pole, responded to his friend's objurgations by a torrent of tears, and fell under the table, breaking some of the dishes.

"Now, then, we must take the baby home," said Maurice, signing to the boy. In the twinkling of an eye the human rag called Gustave was lifted into a chair, clothed in his topcoat and hat, dressed and spruced up, pushed down the spiral staircase, and landed in a cab. Then the prestidigitateur returned and performed his last trick by making the plate disappear upon which Maurice had thrown some money to pay the bill.

It was not far from eleven o'clock when the comrades shook hands, in a thick fog, in which the gaslights looked like the orange pedlers' paper lanterns. Ugh! how damp it was!

"Good-by."

"I will see you again soon."

"Good-night to the ladies."

Arthur Papillon was in evening dress and white cravat, his customary attire every evening, and still had time to show himself in a political salon on the left side, where he met Moichod, the author of that famous *Histoire de Napoléon*, in which he proves that Napoleon was only a mediocre general, and that all his battles were gained by his lieutenants. Jocquelet wished to go to the Odéon and hear, for the tenth time, the fifth act of a piece of the common-sense school, in which the hero, after haranguing against money for four acts in badly rhymed verse, ends by marrying the

young heiress, to the great satisfaction of the *bourgeois*. As to Maurice, before he went to rejoin Mademoiselle Irma at the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, he walked part of the way with Amédée.

"These comrades of ours are a little stupid, aren't they?" said he to his friend.

"I must say that they almost disgust me," replied the young man. "Their brutal way of speaking of women and love wounded me, and you too, Maurice. So much the worse! I will be honest; you, who are so refined and proud, tell me that you did not mean what you said—that you made a pretence of vice just to please the others. It is not possible that you are content simply to gratify your appetite and make yourself a slave to your passions. You ought to have a higher ideal. Your conscience must reproach you."

Maurice brusquely interrupted this tirade, laughing in advance at what he was about to say.

"My conscience? Oh, tender and artless Violette; Oh, modest wood-flower! Conscience, my poor friend, is like a Suède glove, you can wear it soiled. Adieu! We will talk of this another day, when Mademoiselle Irma is not waiting for me."

Amédée walked on alone, shivering in the mist, weary and sad, to the Rue Nôtre-Dame-des-Champs.

No! it could not be true. There must be another love than that known to these brutes. There were other women besides the light creatures they had spoken of. His thoughts reverted to the companion of his childhood, to the pretty little Maria, and again he sees her sewing near the family lamp, and talking

with him without raising her eyes, while he admires her beautiful, drooping lashes. He is amazed to think that this delicious child's presence has never given him the slightest uneasiness; that he has never thought of any other happiness than that of being near her. Why should not a love like that he has dreamed of some day spring up in her own heart? Have they not grown up together? Is he not the only young man that she knows intimately? What happiness to become her fiancé! Yes, it was thus that one should love! Hereafter he would flee from all temptations; he would pass all his evenings with the Gérards; he would keep as near as possible to his dear Maria, content to hear her speak, to see her smile; and he would wait with a heart full of tenderness for the moment when she would consent to become his wife. Oh! the exquisite union of two chaste beings! the adorable kiss of two innocent mouths! Did such happiness really exist?

This beautiful dream warmed the young man's heart, and he reached his home joyous and happy. He gave a vigorous pull to the bell, climbed quickly up the long flights of stairs and opened the door to their apartment. But what was this? His father must have come home very late, for a stream of light shines under the door of his sleeping-room.

"Poor man!" thought Amédée, recalling the scene of the morning. "He may be ill. Let us see."

He had hardly opened the door, when he drew back uttering a shriek of horror and distress. By the light of a candle that burned upon the mantel, Amédée had caught sight of his father extended upon the floor, his

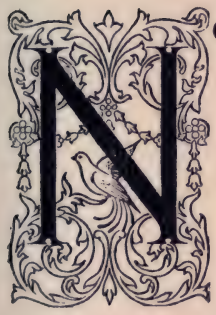
shirt disordered and covered with blood, holding in his clenched right hand the razor with which he had cut his throat.

Yes! the union of two loving hearts had at last taken place. Their love was happiness on earth; but if one of the two dies the other can never be consoled while life lasts.

M. Violette never was consoled.

CHAPTER IX

THORNS OF JEALOUSY



OW Amédée had no family. The day after his father's death he had a violent rupture with M. Isidore Gaufre. Under the pretext that a suicide horrified him, he allowed his niece's husband to be carried to the cemetery in a sixth-class hearse, and did not honor with his presence the funeral, which was even prohibited from using the parish road. But the saintly man was not deterred from swallowing for his dinner that same day, while thundering against the progress of materialism, tripe cooked after the Caen fashion, one of Bérénice's weekly works of art.

Amédée had now no family, and his friends were dispersed. As a reward for passing his examinations in law, Madame Roger took her son with her on a trip to Italy, and they had just left France together.

As to the poor Gérards, just one month after M. Violette's death, the old engraver died suddenly, of apoplexy, at his work; and on that day there were not fifty francs in the house. Around the open grave where they lowered the obscure and honest artist, there was only a group of three women in black, who

were weeping, and Amédée in mourning for his father, with a dozen of Gérard's old comrades, whose romantic heads had become gray. The family was obliged to sell at once, in order to get a little money, what remained of proof-sheets in the boxes, some small paintings, old presents from artist friends who had become celebrated, and the last of the ruined knickknacks—indeed, all that constituted the charm of the house. Then, in order that her eldest daughter might not be so far from the boarding-school where she was employed as teacher of music, Madame Gérard went to live in the Rue St.-Pierre, in Montmartre, where they found a little cheap, first-floor apartment, with a garden as large as one's hand.

Now that he was reduced to his one hundred and twenty-five francs, Amédée was obliged to leave his too expensive apartment in the Rue Nôtre-Dame-des-Champs, and to sell the greater part of his family furniture. He kept only his books and enough to furnish his little room, perched under the roof of an old house in the Faubourg St.-Jacques.

It was far from Montmartre, so he could not see his friends as often as he would have liked, those friends whom grief in common had made dearer than ever to him. One single consolation remained for him —literary work. He threw himself into it blindly, deadening his sorrow with the fruitful and wonderful opiate of poetry and dreams. However, he had now begun to make headway, feeling that he had something new to say. He had long ago thrown into the fire his first poems, awkward imitations of favorite

authors, also his drama after the style of 1830, where the two lovers sang a duet at the foot of the scaffold. He returned to truth and simplicity by the longest way, the schoolboy's road. Taste and inclination both induced him to express simply and honestly what he saw before him; to express, so far as he could, the humble ideal of the poor people with whom he had lived in the melancholy Parisian suburbs where his infancy was passed; in a word, to paint from nature. He tried, feeling that he could succeed; and in those days lived the most beautiful and perfect hours of his life—those in which the artist, already master of his instrument, having still the abundance and vivacity of youthful sensations, writes the first words that he knows to be good, and writes them with entire disinterestedness, not even thinking that others will see them; working for himself alone and for the sole joy of putting in visible form and spreading abroad his ideas, his thoughts—all his heart. Those moments of pure enthusiasm and perfect happiness he never could know again, even after he had nibbled at the savory food of success and had experienced the feverish desire for glory. Delicious hours they were, and sacred, too, such as can only be compared to the divine intoxication of first love.

Amédée worked courageously during the winter months that followed his father's death. He arose at six o'clock in the morning, lighted his lamp and the little stove which heated his room, and, walking up and down, leaning over his page, the poet would vigorously begin his struggle with fancies, ideas, and

words. At nine o'clock he would go out and breakfast at a neighboring creamery; after which he would go to his office. There, his tiresome papers once written, he had two or three hours of leisure, which he employed in reading and taking notes from the volumes borrowed by him every morning at a reading-room on the Rue Royer-Collard; for he had already learned that one leaves college almost ignorant, having, at best, only learned how to study. He left the office at nightfall and reached his room through the Boulevard des Invalides, and Montparnasse, which at this time was still planted with venerable elms; sometimes the lamplighter would be ahead of him, making the large gas-jets shoot out under the leafless old trees. This walk, that Amédée imposed upon himself for health's sake, would bring him, about six o'clock, a workman's appetite for his dinner, in the little creamery situated in front of Val-de-Grâce, where he had formed the habit of going. Then he would return to his garret, and relight his stove and lamp, and work until midnight. This ardent, continuous effort, this will-tension kept in his mind the warmth, animation, and excitement indispensable for poetical production. His mind expanded rapidly, ready to receive the germs that were blown to him by the mysterious winds of inspiration. At times he was astonished to see his pen fill the sheet so rapidly that he would stop, filled with pride at having thus reduced to obedience words and rhythms, and would ask himself what supernatural power had permitted him to charm these divine wild birds.

On Sundays, he had his meals brought him by the *concierge*, working all day and not going out until nearly five o'clock in the afternoon, to dine with Mamma Gérard. It was the only distraction that he allowed himself, or rather the only recompense that he permitted himself. He walked halfway across Paris to buy a cake in the Rue Fontaine for their dessert; then he climbed without fatigue, thanks to his young legs, to the top of Montmartre, lighted by swinging lamps, where one could almost believe one's self in the distant corner of some province. They would be waiting for him to serve the soup, and the young man would seat himself between the widow and the two orphans.

Alas, how hard these poor ladies' lives had become! Damourette, a member of the Institute, remembered that he had once joked in the studios with Gérard, and obtained a small annual pension for the widow; but it was charity—hardly enough to pay the rent. Fortunately Louise, who already looked like an old maid at twenty-three, going about the city all day with her roll of music under her black shawl, had many pupils, and more than twenty houses had well-nigh become uninhabitable through her exertions with little girls, whose red hands made an unendurable racket with their chromatic scales. Louise's earnings constituted the surest part of their revenue. What a strange paradox is the social life in large cities, where Weber's Last Waltz will bring the price of a four-pound loaf of bread, and one pays the grocer with the proceeds of Boccherini's Minuet!

In spite of all, they had hard work to make both ends meet at the Gérards. The pretty Maria wished to make herself useful and aid her mother and sister. She had always shown great taste for drawing, and her father used to give her lessons in pastel. Now she went to the Louvre to work, and tried to copy the Chardins and Latours. She went there alone. It was a little imprudent, she was so pretty; but Louise had no time to go with her, and her mother had to be at home to attend to the housework and cooking. Maria's appearance had already excited the hearts of several young daubers. There were several cases of persistent sadness and loss of appetite in Flandrin's studio; and two of Signol's pupils, who were surprised hovering about the young artist, were hated secretly as rivals; certain projects of duels, after the American fashion, were profoundly considered. To say that Maria was not a little flattered to see all these admirers turn timidly and respectfully toward her; to pretend that she took off her hat and hung it on one corner of her easel because the heat from the furnace gave her neuralgia and not to show her beautiful hair, would be as much of a lie as a politician's promise. However, the little darling was very serious, or at least tried to be. She worked conscientiously and made some progress. Her last copy of the portrait of that Marquise who holds a pug dog in her lap, with a ribbon about his neck, was not very bad. This copy procured a piece of good luck for the young artist.

Père Issacar, a bric-à-brac merchant on the Quay Voltaire—an old-fashioned Jew with a filthy overcoat,

the very sight of which made one long to tear it off—approached Maria one day, just as she was about to sketch a rose in the Marquise's powdered wig, and after raising a hat greasy enough to make the soup for a whole regiment, said to her:

"Matemoiselle, vould you make me von dozen vamily bordraits?"

The young girl did not at first understand his abominable language, but at last he made her comprehend.

Every thing is bought nowadays, even rank, provided, of course, that one has a purse sufficiently well filled. Nothing is simpler! In return for a little money you can procure at the Vatican—second corridor on your right, third door at the left—a brand-new title of Roman Count. A heraldic agency—see advertisement—will plant and make grow at your will a genealogical tree, under whose shade you can give a country breakfast to twenty-five people. You buy a castle with port-holes—port-holes are necessary—in a corner of some reactionary province. You call upon the lords of the surrounding castles with a gold fleur-de-lys in your cravat. You pose as an enraged Legitimist and ferocious Clerical. You give dinners and hunting parties, and the game is won. I will wager that your son will marry into a Faubourg St.-Germain family, a family which descends authentically from the Crusaders.

In order to execute this agreeable buffoonery, you must not forget certain accessories—particularly portraits of your ancestors. They should ornament the castle walls where you regale the country nobles. One

must use tact in the selection of this family gallery. There must be no exaggeration. Do not look too high. Do not claim as a founder of your race a knight in armor hideously painted upon wood, with his coat of arms in one corner of the panel. Bear in mind the date of chivalry. Be satisfied with the head of a dynasty whose gray beard hangs over a well-crimped ruff. I saw a very good example of that kind the other day on the Place Royale. A dog was just showing his disrespect for it as I passed. You can obtain an ancestor like this in the outskirts of the city for fifteen francs, if you haggle a little. Or you need not give yourself so much trouble. Apply to a specialist, Père Issacar, for instance. He will procure magnificent ancestors for you; not dear either! If you will consent to descend to simple magistrates, the price will be insignificant. Chief justices are dirt cheap. Naturally, if you wish to be of the military profession, to have eminent clergy among your antecedents, the price increases. Père Issacar is the only one who can give you, at a reasonable rate, ermine-draped bishops, or a colonel with a Louis XIV wig, and, if you wish it, a blue ribbon and a breast-plate under his red coat. What produces a good effect in a series of family portraits is a series of pastels. What would you say to a goggle-eyed abbé, or an old lady indecently *décolletée*, or a captain of dragoons wearing a tiger-skin cap (it is ten francs more if he has the cross of St. Louis)? Père Issacar knows his business, and always has in reserve thirty of these portraits in charming frames of the period, made expressly for him in the

Faubourg St.-Antoine, and which have all been buried fifteen days and riddled with shot, in order to have the musty appearance and indispensable worm holes.

You can understand now why the estimable Jew, in passing through the Louvre for his weekly promenade, took an interest in little Maria copying the charming Marquise de Latour. He was just at this time short of powdered marquises, and they are always very much in demand. He begged the young woman to take her copy home and make twelve more of it, varying only the color of the dress and some particular detail in each portrait. Thus, instead of the pug dog, marquise No. 1 would hold a King Charles spaniel, No. 2 a monkey, No. 3 a bonbon box, No. 4 a fan. The face could remain the same. All marquises looked alike to Père Issacar; he only exacted that they should all be provided with two black patches, one under the right eye, the other on the left shoulder. This he insisted upon, for the patch, in his eyes, was a symbol of the eighteenth century.

Père Issacar was a fair man and promised to furnish frames, paper, and pastels, and to pay the young girl fifteen francs for each marquise. What was better yet, he promised, if he was pleased with the first work, to order of the young artist a dozen canonesses of Remiremont and a half-dozen of royal gendarmes.

I wish you could have seen those ladies when Maria went home to tell the good news. Louise had just returned from distributing semiquavers in the city; her eyes and poor Mother Gérard's were filled with tears of joy.

"What, my darling," said the mother, embracing her child, "are you going to trouble yourself about our necessaries of life, too?"

"Do you see this little sister?" said Louise, laughing cordially. "She is going to earn a pile of money as large as she is herself. Do you know that I am jealous—I, with my piano and my displeasing profession? Good luck to pastel! It is not noisy, it will not annoy the neighbors, and when you are old you can say, 'I never have played for anybody.'"

But Maria did not wish them to joke. They had always treated her like a doll, a spoiled child, who only knew how to curl her hair and tumble her frocks. Well, they should see!

When Amédée arrived on Sunday with his cake, they told him over several times the whole story, with a hundred details, and showed him the two marquises that Maria had already finished, who wore patches as large as wafers.

She appeared that day more attractive and charming than ever to the young man, and it was then that he conceived his first ambition. If he only had enough talent to get out of his obscurity and poverty, and could become a famous writer and easily earn his living! It was not impossible, after all. Oh, with what pleasure he would ask this exquisite child to be his wife! How sweet it would be to know that she was happy with, and proud of, him! But he must not think of it now, they were too poor; and then, would Maria love him?

He often asked himself that question, and with

uneasiness. In his own heart he felt that the childish intimacy had become a sincere affection, a real love. He had no reason to hope that the same transformation had taken place in the young girl's heart. She always treated him very affectionately, but rather like a good comrade, and she was no more stirred by his presence now than she was when she had lain in wait with him behind the old green sofa to hunt Father Gérard's battered fur hat.

Amédée had most naturally taken the Gérard family into his confidence regarding his work. After the Sunday dinner they would seat themselves around the table where Mamma Gérard had just served the coffee, and the young man would read to his friends, in a grave, slow voice, the poem he had composed during the week. A painter having the taste and inclination for interior scenes, like the old masters of the Dutch school, would have been stirred by the contemplation of this group of four persons in mourning. The poet, with his manuscript in his right hand and marking the syllables with a rhythmical movement of his left, was seated between the two sisters. But while Louise—a little too thin and faded for her years—fixes her attentive eyes upon the reader and listens with avidity, the pretty Maria is listless and sits with a bored little face, gazing mechanically at the other side of the table. Mother Gérard knits with a serious air and her spectacles perched upon the tip of her nose.

Alas! during these readings Louise was the only one who heaved sighs of emotion; and sometimes

even great tear-drops would tremble upon her lashes. She was the only one who could find just the right delicate word with which to congratulate the poet, and show that she had understood and been touched by his verses. At the most Maria would sometimes accord the young poet, still agitated by the declamation of his lines, a careless "It is very pretty!" with a commonplace smile of thanks.

She did not care for poetry, then? Later, if he married her, would she remain indifferent to her husband's intellectual life, insensible even to the glory that he might reap? How sad it was for Amédée to have to ask himself that question!

Soon Maria inspired a new fear within him. Maurice and his mother had been already three months in Italy, and excepting two letters that he had received from Milan, at the beginning of his journey, in the first flush of his enthusiasm, Amédée had had no news from his friend. He excused this negligence on the part of the lazy Maurice, who had smilingly told him, on the eve of departure, not to count upon hearing from him regularly. At each visit that Amédée paid the Gérards, Maria always asked him:

"Have you received any news from your friend Maurice?"

At first he had paid no attention to this, but her persistency at length astonished him, planting a little germ of suspicion and alarm in his heart. Maurice Roger had only paid the Gérards a few visits during the father's lifetime, and accompanied on each occasion by Amédée. He had always observed the most re-

spectful manner toward Maria, and they had perhaps exchanged twenty words. Why should Maria preserve such a particular remembrance of a person so nearly a stranger to her? Was it possible that he had made a deep impression, perhaps even inspired a sentiment of love? Did she conceal in the depths of her heart, when she thought of him, a tender hope? Was she watching for him? Did she wish him to return?

When these fears crossed Amédée's mind, he felt a choking sensation, and his heart was troubled. Happy Maurice, who had only to be seen to please! But immediately, with a blush of shame, the generous poet chased away this jealous fancy. But every Sunday, when Maria, lowering her eyes, and with a slightly embarrassed voice, repeated her question, "Have you received any news from Monsieur Maurice?" Amédée felt a cruelly discouraged feeling, and thought, with deep sadness:

"She never will love me!"

To conquer this new grief, he plunged still more deeply into work; but he did not find his former animation and energy. After the drizzling rain of the last days of March, the spring arrived. Now, when Amédée awoke, it was broad daylight at six o'clock in the morning. Opening his mansard window, he admired, above the tops of the roofs, the large, ruddy sun rising in the soft gray sky, and from the convent gardens beneath came a fresh odor of grass and damp earth. Under the shade of the arched lindens which led to the shrine of a plaster Virgin, a first and almost imperceptible rustle, a presentiment of verdure, so to

speak, ran through the branches, and the three almond trees in the kitchen-garden put forth their delicate flowers. The young poet was invaded by a sweet and overwhelming languor, and Maria's face, which was commonly before his inner vision upon awakening, became confused and passed from his mind. He seated himself for a moment before a table and re-read the last lines of a page that he had begun; but he was immediately overcome by physical lassitude, and abandoned himself to thought, saying to himself that he was twenty years old, and that it would be very good, after all, to enjoy life.

CHAPTER X

A BUDDING POET

IT is the first of May, and the lilacs in the Luxembourg Gardens are in blossom. It has just struck four o'clock. The bright sun and the pure sky have rendered more odious than ever the captivity of the office to Amédée, and he departs before the end of the sitting for a stroll in the Medicis garden around the pond, where, for the amusement of the children in that quarter, a little breeze from the northeast is pushing on a miniature flotilla. Suddenly he hears himself called by a voice which bursts out like a brass band at a country fair.

"Good-day, Violette."

It is Jocquelet, the future comedian, with his turned-up nose, which cuts the air like the prow of a first-class ironclad, superb, triumphant, dressed like a Brazilian, shaved to the quick, the dearest hope of Regnier's class at the Conservatoire—Jocquelet, who has made an enormous success in an act from the "Précieuses," at the last quarter's examination—he says so himself, without any useless modesty—Jocquelet, who will certainly have the first comedy prize at the next examination, and will make his début with-

out delay at the Comédie Française! All this he announces in one breath, like a speech learned by heart, with his terrible voice, like a quack selling shaving-paste from a gilded carriage. In two minutes that favorite word of theatrical people had been repeated thirty times, punctuating the phrases: "I! I! I! I!"

Amédée is only half pleased at the meeting. Jocquelet was always a little too noisy to please him. After all, he was an old comrade, and out of politeness the poet congratulated him upon his success.

Jocquelet questioned him. What was Amédée doing? What had become of him? Where was his literary work? All this was asked with such cordiality and warmth of manner that one would have thought that Jocquelet was interested in Amédée, and had a strong friendship for him. Nothing of the sort. Jocquelet was interested in only one person in this world, and that person was named Jocquelet. One is either an actor or he is not. This personage was always one wherever he was—in an omnibus, while putting on his suspenders, even with the one he loved. When he said to a newcomer, "How do you do?" he put so much feeling into this very original question, that the one questioned asked himself whether he really had not just recovered from a long and dangerous illness. Now, at this time Jocquelet found himself in the presence of an unknown and poor young poet. What *rôle* ought such an eminent person as himself to play in such circumstances? To show affection for the young man, calm his timidity, and

patronize him without too much haughtiness; that was the position to take, and Jocquelet acted it.

Amédée was an artless dupe, and, touched by the interest shown him, he frankly replied:

"Well, my dear friend, I have worked hard this winter. I am not dissatisfied. I think that I have made some progress; but if you knew how hard and difficult it is!"

He was about to confide to Jocquelet the doubts and sufferings of a sincere artist, but Jocquelet, as we have said, thought only of himself, and brusquely interrupted the young poet:

"You do not happen to have a poem with you—something short, a hundred or a hundred and fifty lines—a poem intended for effect, that one could recite?"

Amédée had copied out that very day, at the office, a war story, a heroic episode of Sebastopol that he had heard Colonel Lantz relate not long since at Madame Roger's, and had put into verse with a good French sentiment and quite the military spirit, verse which savored of powder, and went off like reports of musketry. He took the sheets out of his pocket, and, leading the comedian into a solitary by-path of sycamores which skirted the Luxembourg orangery, he read his poem to him in a low voice. Jocquelet, who did not lack a certain literary instinct, was very enthusiastic, for he foresaw a success for himself, and said to the poet:

"You read those verses just like a poet, that is, very badly. But no matter, this battle is very effective,

and I see what I could do with it—with my voice. But what do you mean?" added he, planting himself in front of his friend. "Do you write verses like these and nobody knows anything about them? It is absurd. Do you wish, then, to imitate Chatterton? That is an old game, entirely used up! You must push yourself, show yourself. I will take charge of that myself! Your evening is free, is it not? Very well, come with me; before six o'clock I shall have told your name to twenty trumpeters, who will make all Paris resound with the news that there is a poet in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques. I will wager, you savage, that you never have put your foot into the Café de Séville. Why, my dear fellow, it is our first manufactory of fame! Here is the Odéon omnibus, get on! We shall be at the Boulevard Montmartre in twenty minutes, and I shall baptize you there, as a great man, with a glass of absinthe."

Dazzled and carried away, Amédée humored him and climbed upon the outside of the omnibus with his comrade. The vehicle hurried them quickly along toward the quay, crossed the Seine, the Carrousel, and passed before the Théâtre-Français, at which Jocquelet, thinking of his approaching début, shook his fist, exclaiming, "Now I am ready for you!" Here the young men were planted upon the asphalt boulevard, in front of the Café de Séville.

Do not go to-day to see this old incubator, in which so many political and literary celebrities have been hatched; for you will only find a café, just like any other, with its groups of ugly little Jews who discuss

the coming races, and here and there a poor creature, painted like a Jezebel, dying of chagrin over her pot of beer.

At the decline of the Second Empire—it was May 1, 1866, that Amédée Violette entered there for the first time—the Café de Séville passed for, and with reason too, one of the most remarkable places in Paris. For this glorious establishment had furnished by itself, or nearly so, the eminent staff of our third Republic! Be honest, Monsieur le Préfet, you who presided at the opening of the agricultural meeting in our province, and who played the peacock in your dress-coat, embroidered in silver, before an imposing line of horned creatures; be honest and admit, that, at the time when you opposed the official candidates in your democratic journal, you had your pipe in the rack of the Café de Séville, with your name in white enamel upon the blackened bowl! Remember, Monsieur le Deputé, you who voted against all the exemption cases of the military law, remember who, in this very place, at your daily game of dominoes for sixty points, more than a hundred times ranted against the permanent army—you, accustomed to the uproar of assemblies and the noise of the tavern—contributed to the parliamentary victories by crying, "Six all! count that!" And you too, Monsieur le Ministre, to whom an office-boy, dating from the tyrants, still says, "Your excellency," without offending you; you also have been a constant frequenter of the Café de Séville, and such a faithful customer that the cashier calls you by your Christian name. And do you recall, Monsieur the future presi-

dent of the Council, that you did not acquit yourself very well when the sedentary dame, who never has been seen to rise from her stool, and who, as a joker pretended, was afflicted with two wooden legs, called you by a little sign to the desk, and said to you, not without a shade of severity in her tone: "Monsieur Eugène, we must be thinking of this little bill."

Notwithstanding his title of poet, Amédée had not the gift of prophecy. While seeing all these negligently dressed men seated outside at the Café de Séville's tables, taking appetizers, the young man never suspected that he had before him the greater part of the legislators destined to assure, some years later, France's happiness. Otherwise he would have respectfully taken note of each drinker and the color of his drink, since at a later period this would have been very useful to him as a mnemonical method for the understanding of our parliamentary combinations, which are a little complicated, we must admit. For example, would it not have been handy and agreeable to note down that the recent law on sugars had been voted by the solid majority of absinthe and bitters, or to know that the Cabinet's fall, day before yesterday, might be attributed simply to the disloyal and perfidious abandonment of the bitter mints or black-currant wine?

Jocquelet, who professed the most advanced opinions in politics, distributed several riotous and patronizing hand-shakes among these future statesmen as he entered the establishment, followed by Amédée.

Here, there were still more of politics, and also

poets and literary men. They lived a sort of hurly-burly life, on good terms, but one could not get them confounded, for the politicians were all beard, the *littérateurs*, all hair.

Jocquelet directed his steps without hesitation toward the magnificent red head of the whimsical poet, Paul Sillery, a handsome young fellow with a wide-awake face, who was nonchalantly stretched upon the red velvet cushion of the window-seat, before a table, around which were three other heads of thick hair worthy of our early kings.

"My dear Paul," said Jocquelet, in his most thrilling voice, handing Sillery Amédée's manuscript, "here are some verses that I think are superb, and I am going to recite them as soon as I can, at some entertainment or benefit. Read them and give us your opinion of them. I present their author to you, Monsieur Amédée Violette. Amédée, I present you to Monsieur Paul Sillery."

All the heads of hair, framing young and amiable faces, turned curiously toward the newcomer, whom Paul Sillery courteously invited to be seated, with the established formula, "What will you take?" Then he began to read the lines that the comedian had given him.

Amédée, seated on the edge of his chair, was distracted with timidity, for Paul Sillery already enjoyed a certain reputation as a rising poet, and had established a small literary sheet called *La Guêpe*, which published upon its first page caricatures of celebrated men with large heads and little bodies, and Amédée

had read in it some of Paul's poems, full of impertinence and charm. An author whose work had been published! The editor of a journal! The idea was stunning to poor innocent Violette, who was not aware then that *La Guêpe* could not claim forty subscribers. He considered Sillery something wonderful, and waited with a beating heart for the verdict of so formidable a judge. At the end of a few moments Sillery said, without raising his eyes from the manuscript:

"Here are some fine verses!"

A flood of delight filled the heart of the poet from the Faubourg St.-Jacques.

As soon as he had finished his reading, Paul arose from his seat, and, extending both hands over the carafes and glasses to Amédée, said, enthusiastically:

"Let me shake hands with you! Your description of the battle-scene is astonishing! It is admirable! It is as clear and precise as Mérimée, and it has all the color and imagination that he lacks to make him a poet. It is something absolutely new. My dear Monsieur Violette, I congratulate you with all my heart! I can not ask you for this beautiful poem for *La Guêpe* that Jocquelet is so fortunate as to have to recite, and of which I hope he will make a success. But I beg of you, as a great favor, to let me have some verses for my paper; they will be, I am sure, as good as these, if not better. To be sure, I forgot to tell you that we shall not be able to pay you for the copy, as *La Guêpe* does not prosper; I will even admit that it only stands on one leg. In order to make it appear for a few months longer, I have recently been obliged

to go to a money-lender, who has left me, instead of the classical stuffed crocodile, a trained horse which he had just taken from an insolvent circus. I mounted the noble animal to go to the Bois, but at the Place de la Concorde he began to waltz around it, and I was obliged to get rid of this dancing quadruped at a considerable loss. So your contribution to *La Guêpe* would have to be gratuitous, like those of all the rest. You will give me the credit of having saluted you first of all, my dear Violette, by the rare and glorious title of true poet. You will let me reserve the pleasure of intoxicating you with the odor that a printer's first proofs give, will you not? Is it agreed?"

Yes, it was agreed! That is to say, Amédée, touched to the depths of his heart by so much good grace and fraternal cordiality, was so troubled in trying to find words to express his gratitude, that he made a terrible botch of it.

"Do not thank me," said Paul Sillery, with his pleasant but rather sceptical smile, "and do not think me better than I am. If all your verses are as strong as these that I have just read, you will soon publish a volume that will make a sensation, and—who knows? —perhaps will inspire me first of all with an ugly attack of jealousy. Poets are no better than other people; they are like the majority of Adam's sons, vain and envious, only they still keep the ability to admire, and the gift of enthusiasm, and that proves their superiority and is to their credit. I am delighted to have found a mare's nest to-day, an original and sincere poet, and with your permission we will

celebrate this happy meeting. The price of the waltzing horse having hardly sufficed to pay off the debt to the publisher of *La Guêpe*, I am not in funds this evening; but I have credit at Père Lebuffle's, and I invite you all to dinner at his pot-house; after which we will go to my rooms, where I expect a few friends, and there you will read us your verses, Violette; we will all read some of them, and have a fine orgy of rich rhymes."

This proposition was received with favor by the three young men with the long hair, *à la* Clodion and Chilpéric. As for Violette, he would have followed Paul Sillery at that moment, had it been into the infernal regions.

Jocquelet could not go with them, he had promised his evening to a lady, he said, and he gave this excuse with such a conceited smile that all were convinced he was going to crown himself with the most flattering of laurels at the mansion of some princess of the royal blood. In reality, he was going to see one of his Conservatoire friends, a large, lanky dowdy, as swarthy as a mole and full of pretensions, who was destined for the tragic line of character, and inflicted upon her lover Athalie's dream, Camille's imprecations, and Phèdre's monologue.

After paying for the refreshments, Sillery gave his arm to Amédée, and, followed by the three Merovingians, they left the café. Forcing a way through the crowd which obstructed the sidewalk of the Faubourg Montmartre he conducted his guests to Père Lebuffle's *table d'hôte*, which was situated on the third

floor of a dingy old house in the Rue Lamartine, where a sickening odor of burnt meat greeted them as soon as they reached the top of the stairs. They found there, seated before a tablecloth remarkable for the number of its wine-stains, two or three wild-looking heads of hair, and four or five shaggy beards, to whom Père Lebuffle was serving soup, aided by a tired-looking servant. The name under which Sillery had designated the proprietor of the *table d'hôte* might have been a nickname, for this stout person in his shirt-sleeves recommended himself to one's attentions by his bovine face and his gloomy, wandering eyes. To Amédée's amazement, Père Lebuffle called the greater part of his clients "thou," and as soon as the newcomers were seated at table, Amédée asked Sillery, in a low voice, the cause of this familiarity.

"It is caused by the hard times, my dear Violette," responded the editor of *La Guêpe* as he unfolded his napkin: "There is no longer a 'Mæcenas' or 'Lawrence the Magnificent.' The last patron of literature and art is Père Lebuffle. This wretched cook, who has perhaps never read a book or seen a picture, has a fancy for painters and poets, and allows them to cultivate that plant, Debt, which, contrary to other vegetables, grows all the more, the less it is watered with instalments. We must pardon the good man," said he, lowering his voice, "his little sin—a sort of vanity. He wishes to be treated like a comrade and friend by the artists. Those who have several accounts brought forward upon his ledger, arrive at the point of calling him 'thou,' and I, alas! am of that num-

ber. Thanks to that, I am going to make you drink something a little less purgative than the so-called wine which is turning blue in that carafe, and of which I advise you to be suspicious. I say, Lebuffle, my friend here, Monsieur Amédée Violette, will be, sooner or later, a celebrated poet. Treat him accordingly, my good fellow, and go and get us a bottle of Moulin-à-Vent."

The conversation meanwhile became general between the bearded and long-haired men. Is it necessary to say that they were all animated, both politicians and *littérateurs*, with the most revolutionary sentiments? At the very beginning, with the sardines, which evidently had been pickled in lamp-oil, a terribly hairy man, the darkest of them all, with a beard that grew up into its owner's eyes and then sprung out again in tufts from his nose and ears, presented some elegiac regrets to the memory of Jean-Paul Marat, and declared that at the next revolution it would be necessary to realize the programme of that delightful friend of the people, and make one hundred thousand heads fall.

"By thunder, Flambard, you have a heavy hand!" exclaimed one of the least important of beards, one of those that degenerate into side-whiskers as they become conservative. "One hundred thousand heads!"

"It is the minimum," replied the sanguinary beard.

Now, it had just been revealed to Amédée that under this ferocious beard was concealed a photographer, well known for his failures, and the young man could not help thinking that if the one hundred

thousand heads in question had posed before the said Flambard's camera, he would not show such impatience to see them fall under the guillotine.

The conversation of the men with the luxuriant hair was none the less anarchical when the roast appeared, which sprung from the legendary animal called *vache enragée.* The possessor of the longest and thickest of all the shock-heads, which spread over the shoulders of a young story-writer—between us, be it said, he made a mistake in not combing it oftener—imparted to his brothers the subject for his new novel, which should have made the hair of the others bristle with terror; for the principal episode in this agreeable fiction was the desecration of a dead body in a cemetery by moonlight. There was a sort of hesitation in the audience, a slight movement of recoil, and Sillery, with a dash of raillery in his glance, asked the novelist:

"Why the devil do you write such a story?"

The novelist replied, in a thundering tone:

"To astonish the *bourgeoisie !*"

And nobody made the slightest objection.

To "astonish the *bourgeoisie*" was the dearest hope and most ardent wish of these young men, and this desire betrayed itself in their slightest word; and doubtless Amédée thought it legitimate and even worthy of praise. However, he did not believe—must we admit his lack of confidence?—that so many glorious efforts were ever crowned with success. He went so far as to ask himself whether the character and cleverness of these *bourgeoisie* would not lead them to ignore not only the works, but even the existence, of the

authors who sought to "astonish" them; and he thought, not without sadness, that when *La Guêpe* should have published this young novelist's ghostly composition, the unconquerable *bourgeoisie* would know nothing about it, and would continue to devote itself to its favorite customs, such as tapping the barometer to know whether there was a change, or to heave a deep sigh after guzzling its soup, saying, "I feel better!" without being the least astonished in the world.

In spite of these mental reservations, which Amédée reproached himself with, being himself an impure and contemptible Philistine, the poet was delighted with his new friends and the unknown world opening before him. In this Bohemian corner, where one got intoxicated with wild excesses and paradoxes, recklessness and gayety reigned. The sovereign charm of youth was there, and Amédée, who had until now lived in a dark hiding-place, blossomed out in this warm atmosphere.

After a horrible dessert of cheese and prunes, Père Lebuffle's guests dispersed. Sillery escorted Amédée and the three Merovingians to the little, sparsely furnished first floor in the Rue Pigalle, where he lived; and half a dozen other lyric poets, who might have furnished some magnificent trophies for an Apache warrior's scalping-knife, soon came to reënforce the club which met there every Wednesday evening.

Seats were wanting at the beginning, but Sillery drew from a closet an old black trunk which would hold two, and contented himself, as master of the

house, with sitting from time to time, with legs dangling, upon the marble mantel. The company thus found themselves very comfortable; still more so when an old woman with a dirty cap had placed upon the table, in the middle of the room, six bottles of beer, some odd glasses, and a large flowered plate upon which was a package of cut tobacco with cigarette paper. They began to recite their verses in a cloud of smoke. Each recited his own, called upon by Sillery; each would rise without being urged, place his chair in front of him, and leaning one hand upon its back, would recite his poem or elegy. Certainly some of them were wanting in genius, some were even ludicrous. Among the number was a little fellow with a cadaverous face, about as large as two farthings' worth of butter, who declared, in a long speech with flat rhymes, that an Asiatic harem was not capable of quenching his ardent love of pleasure. A fat-faced fellow with a good, healthy, country complexion, announced, in a long story, his formal intention of dying of a decline, on account of the treason of a courtesan with a face as cold as marble; while, if the facts were known, this peaceable boy lived with an artless child of the people, brightening her lot by reducing her to a state of slavery; she blacked his boots for him every morning before he left the house.

In spite of these ridiculous things, there were present some genuine poets who knew their business and had real talent. These filled Amédée with respect and fear, and when Sillery called his name, he arose with a dry mouth and heavy heart.

"It is your turn now, you newcomer! Recite us your 'Before Sebastopol.'"

And so, thoroughbred that he was, Amédée overcame his emotion and recited, in a thrilling voice, his military rhymes, that rang out like the report of a veteran's gun.

The last stanza was greeted with loud applause, and all the auditors arose and surrounded Amédée to offer him their congratulations.

"Why, it is superb!"

"Entirely new!"

"It will make an enormous success!"

"It is just what is needed to arouse the public!"

"Recite us something else!—something else!"

Reassured and encouraged, master of himself, he recited a popular scene in which he had freely poured out his love for the poor people. He next recited some of his Parisian suburban scenes, and then a series of sonnets, entitled "Love's Hopes," inspired by his dear Maria; and he astonished all these poets by the versatility and variety of his inspirations.

At each new poem bravos were thundered out, and the young man's heart expanded with joy under this warm sunshine of success. His audience vied with each other to approach Amédée first, and to shake his hand. Alas! some of those who were there would, later, annoy him by their low envy and treason; but now, in the generous frankness of their youth, they welcomed him as a master.

What an intoxicating evening! Amédée reached his home about two o'clock in the morning, his hands

burning with the last grasps, his brain and heart intoxicated with the strong wine of praise. He walked with long and joyful strides through the fairy scene of a beautiful moonlight, in the fresh morning wind which made his clothes flutter and caressed his face. He thought he even felt the breath of fame.

CHAPTER XI

SUCCESS

UCCESS, which usually is as fickle as justice, took long strides and doubled its stations in order to reach Amédée. The Café de Séville, and the coterie of long-haired writers, were busying themselves with the rising poet already. His suite of sonnets, published in *La Guêpe*, pleased some of the journalists, who reproduced them in portions in well-distributed journals. Ten days after Amédée's meeting with Jocquelet, the latter recited his poem "Before Sebastopol" at a magnificent entertainment given at the Gaîté for the benefit of an illustrious actor who had become blind and reduced to poverty.

This "dramatic solemnity," to use the language of the advertisement, began by being terribly tiresome. There was an audience present who were accustomed to grand Parisian *soirées*, a *blasé* and satiated public, who, upon this warm evening in the suffocating theatre, were more fatigued and satiated than ever. The sleepy journalists collapsed in their chairs, and in the back part of the stage-boxes, ladies' faces, almost green under paint, showed the excessive lassitude of a

long winter of pleasure. The Parisians had all come there from custom, without having the slightest desire to do so, just as they always came, like galley-slaves condemned to "first nights." They were so lifeless that they did not even feel the slightest horror at seeing one another grow old. This chloroformed audience was afflicted with a long and too heavy programme, as is the custom in performances of this kind. They played fragments of the best known pieces, and sang songs from operas long since fallen into disuse even on street organs. This public saw the same comedians march out; the most famous are the most monotonous; the comical ones abused their privileges; the lover spoke distractedly through his nose; the great coquette—the actress *par excellence*, the last of the Célimènes—discharged her part in such a sluggish way that when she began an adverb ending in "*ment*," one would have almost had time to go out and smoke a cigarette or drink a glass of beer before she reached the end of the said adverb.

But at the most lethargic moment of this drowsy *soirées*, after the comedians from the Français had played in a stately manner one act from a tragedy, Jocquelet appeared. Jocquelet, still a pupil at the Conservatoire, showed himself to the public for the first time and by an exceptional grace—Jocquelet, absolutely unknown, too short in his evening clothes, in spite of the two packs of cards that he had put in his boots. He appeared, full of audacity, riding his high horse, raising his flat-nosed, bull-dog face toward the "gallery gods," and, in his voice capable of mak-

ing Jericho's wall fall or raising Jehoshaphat's dead, he dashed off in one effort, but with intelligence and heroic feeling, his comrade's poem.

The effect was prodigious. This bold, common, but powerful actor, and these picturesque and modern verses were something entirely new to this public satiated with old trash. What a happy surprise! Two novelties at once! To think of discovering an unheard-of poet and an unknown comedian! To nibble at these two green fruits! Everybody shook off his torpor; the anæsthetized journalists aroused themselves; the colorless and sleepy ladies plucked up a little animation; and when Jocquelet had made the last rhyme resound like a grand flourish of trumpets, all applauded enough to split their gloves.

In one of the theatre lobbies, behind a bill-board pasted over with old placards, Amédée Violette heard with delight the sound of the applause which seemed like a shower of hailstones. He dared not think of it! Was it really his poem that produced so much excitement, which had thawed this cold public? Soon he did not doubt it, for Jocquelet, who had just been recalled three times, threw himself into the poet's arms and glued his perspiring, painted face to his.

"Well, my little one, I have done it!" he exclaimed, bursting with gratification and vanity. "You heard how I caught them!"

Immediately twenty, thirty, a hundred spectators appeared, most of them very correct in white cravats, but all eager and with beaming countenances, asking to see the author and the interpreter, and to be pre-

sented to them, that they might congratulate them with an enthusiastic word and a shake of the hand. Yes! it was a success, an instantaneous one. It was certainly that rare tropical flower of the Parisian greenhouse which blossoms out so seldom, but so magnificently.

One large, very common-looking man, wearing superb diamond shirt-buttons, came in his turn to shake Amédée's hand, and in a hoarse, husky voice which would have been excellent to propose tickets "cheaper than at the office!" he asked for the manuscript of the poem that had just been recited.

"It is so that I may put you upon the first page of my to-morrow's edition, young man, and I publish eighty thousand. Victor Gaillard, editor of *Le Tapage*. Does that please you?"

He took the manuscript without listening to the thanks of the poet, who trembled with joy at the thought that his work had caught the fancy of this Barnum of the press, the foremost advertiser in France and Europe, and that his verses would meet the eyes of two hundred thousand readers.

Yes, it was certainly a success, and he experienced the first bitterness of it as soon as he arrived the next morning at the Café de Séville, where he now went every two or three days at the hour for absinthe. His verses had appeared in that morning's *Tapage*, printed in large type and headed by a few lines of praise written by Victor Gaillard, *à la* Barnum. As soon as Amédée entered the café he saw that he was the object of general attention, and the lyric gentlemen greeted

him with acclamations and bravos; but at certain expressions of countenance, constrained looks, and bitter smiles, the impressionable young man felt with a sudden sadness that they already envied him.

"I warned you of it," said Paul Sillery to him, as he led him into a corner of the café. "Our good friends are not pleased, and that is very natural. The greater part of these rhymers are 'cheap jewellers,' and they are jealous of a master workman. Above all things, pretend not to notice it; they will never forgive you for guessing their bad sentiments. And then you must be indulgent to them. You have your beautiful lieutenant's epaulettes, Violette, do not be too hard upon these poor privates. They also are fighting under the poetic flag, and ours is a poverty-stricken regiment. Now you must profit by your good luck. Here you are, celebrated in forty-eight hours. Do you see, even the political people look at you with curiosity, although a poet in the estimation of these austere persons is an inferior and useless being. It is all they will do to accept Victor Hugo, and only on account of his 'Châtiments.' You are the lion of the day. Lose no time. I met just now upon the boulevard Massif, the publisher. He had read *Le Tapage* and expects you. Carry him all your poems to-morrow; there will be enough to make a volume. Massif will publish it at his own expense, and you will appear before the public in one month. You never will inveigle a second time that big booby of a Gaillard, who took a mere passing fancy for you. But no matter! I know your book, and it will be a success. You are

launched. Forward, march! Truly, I am better than I thought, for your success gives me pleasure."

This amiable comrade's words easily dissipated the painful feelings that Amédée had just experienced. However, it was one of those exalted moments when one will not admit that evil exists. He spent some time with the poets, forcing himself to be more gracious and friendly than ever, and left them persuaded—the unsuspecting child!—that he had disarmed them by his modesty; and very impatient to share his joy with his friends, the Gérards, he quickly walked the length of Montmartre and reached them just at their dinner hour.

They did not expect him, and only had for their dinner the remains of the boiled beef of the night before, with some cucumbers. Amédée carried his cake, as usual, and, what was better still, two sauces that always make the poorest meal palatable—hope and happiness.

They had already read the journals and knew that the poem had been applauded at the Gaîté, and that it had at once been printed on the first page of the journal; and they were all so pleased, so glad, that they kissed Amédée on both cheeks. Mamma Gérard remembered that she had a few bottles—five or six—of old chambertin in the cellar, and you could not have prevented the excellent woman from taking her key and taper at once, and going for those old bottles covered with cobwebs and dust, that they might drink to the health of the triumphant one. As to Louise, she was radiant, for in several houses where she gave

lessons she had heard them talk of the fine and admirable verses published in *Le Tapage*, and she was very proud to think that the author was a friend of hers. What completed Amédée's pleasure was that for the first time Maria seemed to be interested in his poem, and said several times to him, with such a pretty, vain little air:

"Do you know, your battle is very nice. Amédée, you are going to become a great poet, a celebrated man! What a superb future you have before you!"

Ah! what exquisitely sweet hopes he carried away that evening to his room in the Faubourg St.-Jacques! They gave him beautiful dreams, and pervaded his thoughts the next morning when the *concierge* brought him two letters.

Still more happiness! The first letter contained two notes of a hundred francs each, with Victor Gaillard's card, who congratulated Amédée anew and asked him to write something for his journal in the way of prose; a story, or anything he liked. The young poet gave a cry of joyful surprise when he recognized the handwriting of Maurice Roger upon the other envelope.

"I have just returned to Paris, my dear Amédée," wrote the traveller, "and your success was my first greeting. I must embrace you quickly and tell you how happy I am. Come to see me at four o'clock in my den in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince. We will dine and pass the evening together."

Ah! how the poet loved life that morning, how good and sweet it seemed to him! Clothed in his best, he gayly descended the Rue St.-Jacques, where boxes

of asparagus and strawberries perfumed the fruit-stalls, and went to the Boulevard St. Michel, where he purchased an elegant gray felt hat and a new cravat. Then he went to the Café Voltaire, where he lunched. He changed his second hundred-franc bill, so that he might feel, with the pleasure of a child, the beautiful louis d'or which he owed to his work and its success. At the office the head clerk—a good fellow, who sang well at dinners—complimented Amédée upon his poem. The young man had only made his appearance to ask for leave that afternoon, so as to take his manuscript to the publisher.

Once more in the street in the bright May sun, after the fashion of nabobs, he took an open carriage and was carried to Massif, in the Passage des Princes. The editor of the *Jeunes* was seated in his office, which was decorated with etchings and beautiful bindings. He is well known by his magnificent black beard and his large bald head, upon which a wicked jester once advised him to paste his advertisements; he publishes the works of audacious authors and sensational books, and had the honor of sharing with Charles Bazile, the poet, an imprisonment at St.-Pélagie. He received this thin-faced rhymer coldly. Amédée introduced himself, and at once there was a broad smile, a handshake, and a connoisseur's greedy sniffling. Then Massif opened the manuscript.

"Let us see! Ah, yes, with margins and false titles we can make out two hundred and fifty pages."

The business was settled quickly. A sheet of stamped paper—an agreement! Massif will pay all

the expenses of the first edition of one thousand, and if there is another edition — and of course there will be!—he will give him ten cents a copy. Amédée signs without reading. All that he asks is that the volume should be published without delay.

"Rest easy, my dear poet! You will receive the first proofs in three days, and in one month it will appear."

Was it possible? Was Amédée not dreaming? He, poor Violette's son, the little office clerk—his book would be published, and in a month! Readers and unknown friends will be moved by his agitation, will suffer in his suspense; young people will love him and find an echo of their sentiments in his verses; women will dreamily repeat—with one finger in his book—some favorite verse that touches their hearts! Ah! he must have a confidant in his joy, he must tell some true friend.

"Driver, take me to the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince."

He mounted, four steps at a time, the stairs leading to Maurice's room. The key is in the door. He enters and finds the traveller there, standing in the midst of the disorder of open trunks.

"Maurice!"

"Amédée!"

What an embrace! How long they stood hand in hand, looking at each other with happy smiles!

Maurice is more attractive and gracious than ever. His beauty is more manly, and his golden moustache glistens against his sun-browned skin. What a fine fellow! How he rejoiced at his friend's first success!

"I am certain that your book will turn everybody's

head. I always told you that you were a genuine poet. We shall see!"

As to himself, he was happy too. His mother had let him off from studying law and allowed him to follow his vocation. He was going to have a studio and paint. It had all been decided in Italy, where Madame Roger had witnessed her son's enthusiasm over the great masters. Ah, Italy! Italy! and he began to tell of his trip, show knickknacks and souvenirs of all kinds that littered the room. He turned in his hands, that he might show all its outlines, a little terra-cotta reduction of the Antinous in the Museum of Naples. He opened a box, full to bursting, of large photographs, and passed them to his friend with exclamations of retrospective admiration.

"Look! the Coliseum! the ruins of Pœstum—and this antique from the Vatican! Is it not beautiful?"

While looking at the pictures he recalled the things that he had seen and the impressions he had experienced. There was a band of collegians in little capes and short trousers taking their walk; they wore buckled shoes, like the abbés of olden times, and nothing could be more droll than to see these childish priests play leapfrog. There, upon the Riva dei Schiavoni, he had followed a Venetian. "Shabbily dressed, and fancy, my friend, bare-headed, in a yellow shawl with ragged green fringe! No, I do not know whether she was pretty, but she possessed in her person all the attractions of Giorgione's goddesses and Titian's courtesans combined!"

Maurice is still the same wicked fellow. But, bah!

it suits him; he even boasts of it with such a joyous ardor and such a youthful dash, that it is only one charm the more in him. The clock struck seven, and they went to dine. They started off through the Latin Quarter. Maurice gave his arm to Amédée and told him of his adventures on the other side of the Alps. Maurice, once started on this subject, could not stop, and while the dinner was being served the traveller continued to describe his escapades. This kind of conversation was dangerous for Amédée; for it must not be forgotten that for some time the young poet's innocence had weighed upon him, and this evening he had some pieces of gold in his pocket that rang a chime of pleasure. While Maurice, with his elbow upon the table, told him his tales of love, Amédée gazed out upon the sidewalk at the women who passed by in fresh toilettes, in the gaslight which illuminated the green foliage, giving a little nod of the head to those whom they knew. There was voluptuousness in the very air, and it was Amédée who arose from the table and recalled to Maurice that it was Thursday, and that there was a *fête* that night at Bullier's; and he also was the one to add, with a deliberate air:

"Shall we take a turn there?"

"Willingly," replied his gay friend. "Ah, ha! we are then beginning to enjoy ourselves a little, Monsieur Violette! Go to Bullier's? so be it. I am not sorry to assure myself whether or not I still love the Parisians."

They started off, smoking their cigarettes. Upon the highway, going in the same direction as them-

selves, were victorias carrying women in spring costumes and wearing bonnets decked with flowers. From time to time the friends were elbowed by students shouting popular refrains and walking in Indian file.

Here is Bullier's! They step into the blazing entrance, and go thence to the stairway which leads to the celebrated public ballroom. They are stifled by the odor of dust, escaping gas, and human flesh. Alas! there are in every village in France doctors in hansom cabs, country lawyers, and any quantity of justices of the peace, who, I can assure you, regret this stench as they take the fresh air in the open country under the starry heavens, breathing the exquisite perfume of new-mown hay; for it is mingled with the little poetry that they have had in their lives, with their student's love-affairs, and their youth.

All the same, this Bullier's is a low place, a caricature of the Alhambra in pasteboard. Three or four thousand moving heads in a cloud of tobacco-smoke, and an exasperating orchestra playing a quadrille in which dancers twist and turn, tossing their legs with calm faces and audacious gestures.

"What a mob!" said Amédée, already a trifle disgusted. "Let us go into the garden."

They were blinded by the gas there; the thickets looked so much like old scenery that one almost expected to see the yellow breastplates of comic-opera dragoons; and the jet of water recalled one of those little spurts of a shooting-gallery upon which an empty egg-shell dances. But they could breathe there a little.

"Boy! two sodas," said Maurice, striking the table

with his cane; and the two friends sat down near the edge of a walk where the crowd passed and repassed. They had been there about ten minutes when two women stopped before them.

"Good-day, Maurice," said the taller, a brunette with rich coloring, the genuine type of a tavern girl.

"What, Margot!" exclaimed the young man. "Will you take something? Sit down a moment, and your friend too. Do you know, your friend is charming? What is her name?"

"Rosine," replied the stranger, modestly, for she was only about eighteen, and, in spite of the blond frizzles over her eyes, she was not yet bold, poor child! She was making her début, it was easy to see.

"Well, Mademoiselle Rosine, come here, that I may see you," continued Maurice, seating the young girl beside him with a caressing gesture. "You, Margot, I authorize to be unfaithful to me once more in favor of my friend Amédée. He is suffering with lovesickness, and has a heart to let. Although he is a poet, I think he happens to have in his pocket enough to pay for a supper."

Everywhere and always the same, the egotistical and amiable Maurice takes the lion's share, and Amédée, listening only with one ear to the large Margot, who is already begging him to make an acrostic for her, thinks Rosine is charming, while Maurice says a thousand foolish things to her. In spite of himself, the poet looks upon Maurice as his superior, and thinks it perfectly natural that he should claim the prettier of the two women. No matter! Amédée

wanted to enjoy himself too. This Margot, who had just taken off her gloves to drink her wine, had large, red hands, and seemed as silly as a goose, but all the same she was a beautiful creature, and the poet began to talk to her, while she laughed and looked at him with a wanton's eyes. Meanwhile the orchestra burst into a polka, and Maurice, in raising his voice to speak to his friend, called him several times Amédée, and once only by his family name, Violette. Suddenly little Rosine started up and looked at the poet, saying with astonishment:

"What! Is your name Amédée Violette?"

"Certainly."

"Then you are the boy with whom I played so much when I was a child."

"With me?"

"Yes! Do you not remember Rosine, little Rosine Combarieu, at Madame Gérard's, the engraver's wife, in the Rue Nôtre-Dame-des-Champs? We played games with his little girls. How odd it is, the way one meets old friends!"

What is it that Amédée feels? His entire childhood rises before him. The bitterness of the thought that he had known this poor girl in her innocence and youth, and the Gérards' name spoken in such a place, filled the young man's heart with a singular sadness. He could only say to Rosine, in a voice that trembled a little with pity:

"You! Is it you?"

Then she became red and very embarrassed, lowering her eyes.

Maurice had tact; he noticed that Rosine and Amédée were agitated, and, feeling that he was *de trop*, he arose suddenly and said:

"Now then, Margot. Come on! these children want to talk over their childhood, I think. Give up your acrostic, my child. Take my arm, and come and have a turn."

When they were alone Amédée gazed at Rosine sadly. She was pretty, in spite of her colorless complexion, a child of the faubourg, born with a genius for dress, who could clothe herself on nothing—a linen gown, a flower in her hat. One who lived on salads and vegetables, so as to buy well-made shoes and eighteen-button gloves.

The pretty blonde looked at Amédée, and a timid smile shone in her nut-brown eyes.

"Now, Monsieur Amédée," said she, at last, "it need not trouble you to meet at Bullier's the child whom you once played with. What would have been astonishing would be to find that I had become a fine lady. I am not wise, it is true, but I work, and you need not fear that I go with the first comer. Your friend is a handsome fellow, and very amiable, and I accepted his attentions because he knew Margot, while with you it is very different. It gives me pleasure to talk with you. It recalls Mamma Gérard, who was so kind to me. What has become of her, tell me? and her husband and her daughters?"

"Monsieur Gérard is dead," replied Amédée; "but the ladies are well, and I see them often."

"Do not tell them that you met me here, will you?

It is better not. If I had had a good mother, like those girls, things would have turned out differently for me. But, you remember, papa was always interested in his politics. When I was fifteen years old he apprenticed me to a florist. He was a fine master, a perfect monster of a man, who ruined me! I say, Père Combarieu has a droll trade now; he is manager of a Republican journal—nothing to do—only a few months in prison now and then. I am always working in flowers, and I have a little friend, a pupil at Val-de-Grâce, but he has just left as a medical officer for Algeria. I was lonely all by myself, and this evening big Margot, whom I got acquainted with in the shop, brought me here to amuse myself. But you —what are you doing? Your friend said just now that you were a poet. Do you write songs? I always liked them. Do you remember when I used to play airs with one finger upon the Gérards' old piano? You were such a pretty little boy then, and as gentle as a girl. You still have your nice blue eyes, but they are a little darker. I remember them. No, you can not know how glad I am to see you again!"

They continued to chatter, bringing up old reminiscences, and when she spoke of the Gérard ladies she put on a respectful little air which pleased Amédée very much. She was a poor feather-headed little thing, he did not doubt; but she had kept at least the poor man's treasure, a simple heart. The young man was pleased with her prattling, and as he looked at the young girl he thought of the past and felt a sort of compassion for her. As she was silent for a mo-

ment, the poet said to her, "Do you know that you have become very pretty? What a charming complexion you have! such a lovely pallor!"

The grisette, who had known what poverty was, gave a bitter little laugh:

"Oh, my pallor! that is nothing! It is not the pallor of wealth."

Then, recovering her good-humor at once, she continued:

"Tell me, Monsieur Amédée, does this big Margot, whom you began to pay attentions to a little while ago, please you?"

Amédée quickly denied it. "That immense creature? Never! Now then, Rosine, I came here to amuse myself a little, I will admit. That is not forbidden at my age, is it? But this ball disgusts me. You have no appointment here? No? Is it truly no? Very well, take my arm and let us go. Do you live far from here?"

"In the Avenue d'Orléans, near the Montrouge church."

"Will you allow me to escort you home, then?"

She would be happy to, and they arose and left the ball. It seemed to the young poet as if the pretty girl's arm trembled a little in his; but once upon the boulevard, flooded by the light from the silvery moon, Rosine slackened her steps and became pensive, and her eyes were lowered when Amédée sought a glance from them in the obscurity. How sweet was this new desire that troubled the young man's heart! It was mixed with a little sentiment; his heart beat with

emotion, and Rosine was not less moved. They could both find only insignificant things to say.

"What a beautiful night!"

"Yes! It does one good to breathe the fresh air."

They continued their walk without speaking. Oh, how fresh and sweet it was under these trees!

At last they reached the door of Rosine's dwelling. With a slow movement she pressed her hand upon the bell-button. Then Amédée, with a great effort, and in a confused, husky voice, asked whether he might go up with her and see her little room.

She looked at him steadily, with a tender sadness in her eyes, and then said to him, softly:

"No, certainly not! One must be sensible. I please you this evening, and you know very well that I think you are charming. It is true we knew each other when we were young, and now that we have met again, it seems as if it would be pleasant to love each other. But, believe me, we should commit a great folly, perhaps a wrong. It is better, I assure you, to forget that you ever met me at Bullier's with big Margot, and only remember your little playmate of the Rue Nôtre-Dame-des-Champs. It will be better than a caprice, it will be something pure that you can keep in your heart. Do not let us spoil the remembrance of our childhood, Monsieur Amédée, and let us part good friends."

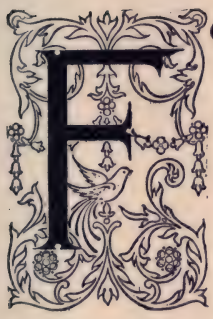
Before the young man could find a reply, the bell pealed again, and Rosine gave Amédée a parting smile, lightly kissing the tips of her fingers, and disappeared behind the door, which fell together with a loud

bang. The poet's first movements was one of rage. Giddy weather-cock of a woman! But he had hardly taken twenty steps upon the sidewalk before he said to himself, with a feeling of remorse, "She was right!" He thought that this poor girl had kept in one corner of her heart a shadow of reserve and modesty, and he was happy to feel rise within him a sacred respect for woman!

Amédée, my good fellow, you are quite worthless as a man of pleasure. You had better give it up!

CHAPTER XII

SOCIAL TRIUMPHS



OR one month now Amédée Violette's volume of verses, entitled *Poems from Nature*, had embellished with its pale-blue covers the shelves of the book-shops. The commotion raised by the book's success, and the favorable criticisms given by the journals, had not yet calmed down at the Café de Séville.

This emotion, let it be understood, did not exist except among the literary men. The politicians disdained poets and poetry, and did not trouble themselves over such commonplace matters. They had affairs of a great deal more importance to determine—the overthrow of the government first, then to remodel the map of Europe! What was necessary to overthrow the Empire? First, conspiracy; second, barricades. Nothing was easier than to conspire. Everybody conspired at the Séville. It is the character of the French, who are born cunning, but are light and talkative, to conspire in public places. As soon as one of our compatriots joins a secret society his first care is to go to his favorite restaurant and to confide, under a bond of the most absolute secrecy, to his most inti-

mate friend, what he has known for about five minutes, the aim of the conspiracy, names of the actors, the day, hour, and place of the rendezvous, the passwords and countersigns. A little while after he has thus relieved himself, he is surprised that the police interfere and spoil an enterprise that has been prepared with so much mystery and discretion. It was in this way that the "beards" dealt in dark deeds of conspiracy at the Café de Séville. At the hour for absinthe and *mazagran* a certain number of Fiesques and Catilines were grouped around each table. At one of the tables in the foreground five old "beards," whitened by political crime, were planning an infernal machine; and in the back of the room ten robust hands had sworn upon the billiard-table to arm themselves for regicide; only, as with all "beards," there were necessarily some false ones among them, that is to say, spies. All the plots planned at the Séville had miserably miscarried.

The art of building barricades was also—you never would suspect it!—very ardently and conscientiously studied. This special branch of the science of fortification reckoned more than one Vauban and Gribeauval among its numbers. "Professor of barricading," was a title honored at the Café de Séville, and one that they would willingly have had engraved upon their visiting-cards. Observe that the instruction was only theoretical; doubtless out of respect for the policemen, they could not give entirely practical lessons to the future rioters who formed the ground-work of the business. The master or doctor of civil war could not go out with them, for instance, and practise in the Rue

Drouot. But he had one resource, one way of getting out of it; namely, dominoes. No! you never would believe what a revolutionary appearance these inoffensive mutton-bones took on under the seditious hands of the habitués of the Café de Séville. These miniature pavements simulated upon the marble table the subjugation of the most complicated of barricades, with all sorts of bastions, redans, and counterscarps. It was something after the fashion of the small models of war-ships that one sees in marine museums. Any one, not in the secret, would have supposed that the "beards" simply played dominoes. Not at all! They were pursuing a course of technical insurrection. When they roared at the top of their lungs "Five on all sides!" certain players seemed to order a general discharge, and they had a way of saying, "I can not!" which evidently expressed the despair of a combatant who has burned his last cartridge. A "beard" in glasses and a stovepipe hat, who had been refused in his youth at the Ecole Polytechnique, was frightful in the rapidity and mathematical precision with which he added up in three minutes his barricade of dominoes. When this man "blocked the six," you were transported in imagination to the Rue Transnonain, or to the Cloître St. Merry. It was terrible!

As to foreign politics, or the remodelling of the map of Europe, it was, properly speaking, only sport and recreation to the "beards." It added interest to the game, that was all. Is it not agreeable, when you are preparing a discard, at the decisive moment, with one hundred at piquet, which gives you *quinte* or *quatorze*,

to deliver unhappy Poland; and when one has the satisfaction to score a king and take every trick, what does it cost to let the Russians enter Constantinople?

Nevertheless, some of the most solemn "beards" of the Café de Séville attached themselves to international questions, to the great problem of European equilibrium. One of the most profound of these diplomats—who probably had nothing to buy suspenders with, for his shirt always hung out between his waistcoat and trousers—was persuaded that an indemnity of two million francs would suffice to obtain from the Pope the transfer of Rome to the Italians; and another Metternich on a small scale assumed for his specialty the business of offering a serious affront to England and threatening her, if she did not listen to his advice, with a loss in a short time of her Indian Empire and other colonial possessions.

Thus the "beards," absorbed by such grave speculations, did not trouble themselves about the vanity called literature, and did not care a pin for Amédée Violette's book. Among the long-haired ones, however, we repeat, the emotion was great. They were furious, they were agitated, and bristled up; the first enthusiasm over Amédée Violette's verses could not be lasting and had been only a mere flash. The young man saw these Merovingians as they really were toward a man who succeeded, that is, severe almost to cruelty. What! the first edition of *Poems from Nature* was exhausted and Massif had another in press! What! the *bourgeoisie*, far from being "astonished" at this book, declared themselves delighted with it, bought

it, read it, and perhaps had it rebound! They spoke favorably of it in all the *bourgeois* journals, that is to say, in those that had subscribers! Did they not say that Violette, incited by Jocquelet, was working at a grand comedy in verse, and that the Théâtre-Français had made very flattering offers to the poet? But then, if he pleased the *bourgeoisie* so much he was—oh, horror!—a *bourgeois* himself. That was obvious. How blind they had been not to see it sooner! When Amédée had read his verses not long since at Sillery's, by what aberration had they confounded this platitude with simplicity, this whining with sincere emotion, these stage tricks with art? Ah! you may rest assured, they never will be caught again!

As the poets' tables at the Café de Séville had been for some time transformed into beds of torture upon which Amédée Violette's poems were stretched out and racked every day from five to seven, the amiable Paul Sillery, with a jeering smile upon his lips, tried occasionally to cry pity for his friend's verses, given up to such ferocious executioners. But these literary murderers, ready to destroy a comrade's book, are more pitiless than the Inquisition. There were two inquisitors more relentless than the others; first, the little scrubby fellow who claimed for his share all the houris of a Mussulman's palace; another, the great elegist from the provinces. Truly, his heartaches must have made him gain flesh, for very soon he was obliged to let out the strap on his waistcoat.

Of course, when Amédée appeared, the conversation was immediately changed, and they began to talk of

insignificant things that they had read in the journals; for example, the fire-damp, which had killed twenty-five working-men in a mine, in a department of the north; or of the shipwreck of a transatlantic steamer in which everything was lost, with one hundred and fifty passengers and forty sailors—events of no importance, we must admit, if one compares them to the recent discovery made by the poet inquisitors of two incorrect phrases and five weak rhymes in their comrade's work.

Amédée's sensitive nature soon remarked the secret hostility of which he was the object in this group of poets, and he now came to the Café de Séville only on rare occasions, in order to take Paul Sillery by the hand, who, in spite of his ironical air, had always shown himself a good and faithful friend.

It was there that he recognized one evening his classmate of the Lycée, Arthur Papillon, seated at one of the political tables. The poet wondered to himself how this fine lawyer, with his temperate opinions, happened to be among these hot-headed revolutionists, and what interest in common could unite this correct pair of blond whiskers to the uncultivated, bushy ones. Papillon, as soon as he saw Amédée, took leave of the group with whom he was talking and came and offered his hearty congratulations to the author of *Poems from Nature*, leading him out upon the boulevard and giving him the key to the mystery.

All the old parties were united against the Empire, in view of the coming elections; Orleanists and Republicans were, for the time being, close friends. He,

Papillon, had just taken his degree, and had attached himself to the fortunes of an old wreck of the July government; who, having rested in oblivion since 1852, had consented to run as candidate for the Liberal opposition in Seine-et-Oise. Papillon was flying around like a hen with her head cut off, to make his companion win the day. He came to the Seville to assure himself of the neutral good-will of the unreconciled journalists, and he was full of hope.

"Oh! my dear friend, how difficult it is to struggle against an official candidate! But our candidate is an astonishing man. He goes about all day upon the railroads in our department, unfolding his programme before the travelling countrymen and changing compartments at each station. What a stroke of genius! a perambulating public assembling. This idea came to him from seeing a harpist make the trip from Havre to Honfleur, playing 'Il Bacio' all the time. Ah, one must look alive! The prefect does not shrink from any way of fighting us. Did he not spread through one of our most Catholic cantons the report that we were Voltairians, enemies to religion and devourers of priests? Fortunately, we have yet four Sundays before us, from now until the voting-day, and the patron will go to high mass and communion in our four more important parishes. That will be a response! If such a man is not elected, universal suffrage is hopeless!"

Amédée was not at that time so disenchanted with political matters as he became later, and he asked himself with an uneasy feeling whether this model candidate, who was perhaps about to give himself sacrile-

gious indigestion, and who showed his profession of faith as a cutler shows his knives, was not simply a quack.

Arthur Papillon did not give him time to devote himself to such unpleasant reflections, but said to him, in a frank, protecting tone:

"And you, my boy, let us see, where do you stand? You have been very successful, have you not? The other evening at the house of Madame la Comtesse Fontaine, you know—the widow of one of Louis Philippe's ministers and daughter of Marshal Lefièvre —Jocquelet recited your 'Sebastopol' with enormous success. What a voice that Jocquelet has! We have not his like at the Paris bar. Fortunate poet! I have seen your book lying about in the boudoir of more than one beautiful woman. Well, I hope that you will leave the Café de Séville and not linger with all these badly combed fellows. You must go into society; it is indispensable to a man of letters, and I will present you whenever you wish."

For the time being Amédée's ardor was a little dampened concerning the Bohemians with whom he enjoyed so short a favor, and who had also in many ways shocked his delicacy. He was not desirous to be called "thou" by Père Lebuffle.

But to go into society! His education had been so modest! Should he know how to appear, how to conduct himself properly? He asked this of Papillon. Our poet was proud, he feared ridicule, and would not consent to play an inferior *rôle* anywhere; and then his success just then was entirely platonic. He was

still very poor and lived in the Faubourg St.-Jacques. Massif ought to pay him in a few days five hundred francs for the second edition of his book; but what is a handful of napoleons?

"It is enough," said the advocate, who thought of his friend's dress. "It is all that is necessary to buy fine linen, and a well cut dress-coat, that is the essential thing. Good form consists, above all things, in keeping silent. With your fine and yielding nature you will become at once a gentleman; better still, you are not a bad-looking fellow; you have an interesting pallor. I am convinced that you will please. It is now the beginning of July, and Paris is almost empty, but Madame la Comtesse Fontaine does not go away until the vacations, as she is looking after her little son, who is finishing his studies at the Lycée Bonaparte. The Countess's drawing-rooms are open every evening until the end of the month, and one meets there all the *chic* people who are delayed in Paris, or who stop here between two journeys. Madame Fontaine is a very amiable and influential old lady; she has a fancy for writers when they are good company. Do not be silly, but go and order yourself some evening clothes. By presenting you there, my dear fellow, I assure you, perhaps in fifteen years, a seat in the Academy. It is agreed! Get ready for next week."

Attention! Amédée Violette is about to make his first appearance in society.

Although his *concierge*, who aided him to finish his toilette and saw him put on his white cravat, had just said to him, "What a love of a husband you

would make!" the poet's heart beat rapidly when the carriage in which he was seated beside Arthur Papillon stopped before the steps of an old house in the Rue de Bellechasse, where Madame la Comtesse Fontaine lived.

In the vestibule he tried to imitate the advocate's bearing, which was full of authority; but quickly despaired of knowing how to swell out his starched shirt-front under the severe looks of four tall lackeys in silk stockings. Amédée was as much embarrassed as if he were presented naked before an examining board. But they doubtless found him "good for service," for the door opened into a brightly lighted drawing-room into which he followed Arthur Papillon, like a frail sloop towed in by an imposing three-master, and behold the timid Amédée presented in due form to the mistress of the house! She was a lady of elephantine proportions, in her sixtieth year, and wore a white camellia stuck in her rosewood-colored hair. Her face and arms were plastered with enough flour to make a plate of fritters; but for all that, she had a grand air and superb eyes, whose commanding glance was softened by so kindly a smile that Amédée was a trifle reassured.

She had much applauded M. Violette's beautiful verse, she said, that Jocquelet had recited at her house on the last Thursday of her season; and she had just read with the greatest pleasure his *Poems from Nature*. She thanked M. Papillon—who bows his head and lets his monocle fall—for having brought M. Violette. She was charmed to make his acquaintance.

Amédée was very much embarrassed to know what to reply to this commonplace compliment which was paid so gracefully. Fortunately he was spared this duty by the arrival of a very much dressed, tall, bony woman, toward whom the Countess darted off with astonishing vivacity, exclaiming, joyfully: "Madame la Maréchale!" and Amédée, still following in the wake of his comrade, sailed along toward the corner of the drawing-room, and then cast anchor before a whole flotilla of black coats. Amédée's spirits began to revive, and he examined the place, so entirely new to him, where his growing reputation had admitted him.

It was a vast drawing-room after the First Empire style, hung and furnished in yellow satin, whose high white panels were decorated with trophies of antique weapons carved in wood and gilded. A dauber from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts would have branded with the epithet "sham" the armchairs and sofas ornamented with sphinx heads in bronze, as well as the massive green marble clock upon which stood, all in gold, a favorite court personage, clothed in a cap, sword, and fig-leaf, who seemed to be making love to a young person in a floating tunic, with her hair dressed exactly like that of the Empress Josephine. But the dauber would have been wrong, for this massive splendor was wanting neither in grandeur nor character. Two pictures only lighted up the cold walls; one, signed by Gros, was an equestrian portrait of the Marshal, Madame Fontaine's father, the old drummer of Pont de Lodi, one of the bravest of Napoleon's lieutenants. He was represented in full-dress uniform,

with an enormous black-plumed hat, brandishing his blue velvet baton, sprinkled with golden bees, and under the rearing horse's legs one could see in the dim distance a grand battle in the snow, and mouths of burning cannons. The other picture, placed upon an easel and lighted by a lamp with a reflector, was one of Ingre's *chef-d'œuvres*. It was the portrait of the mistress of the house at the age of eighteen, a portrait of which the Countess was now but an old and horrible caricature.

Arthur Papillon talked in a low voice with Amédée, explaining to him how Madame Fontaine's drawing-room was neutral ground, open to people of all parties. As daughter of a Marshal of the First Empire, the Countess preserved the highest regard for the people at the Tuileries, although she was the widow of Count Fontaine, who was one of the brood of Royer-Collard's conservatives, a parliamentarian ennobled by Louis-Philippe, twice a colleague of Guizot on the ministerial bench, who died of spite and suppressed ambition after '48 and the *coup d'état*. Besides, the Countess's brother, the Duc d'Eylau, married, in 1829, one of the greatest heiresses in the Faubourg St.-Germain; for his father, the Marshal, whose character did not equal his bravery, attached himself to every government, and carried his candle in the processions on Corpus Christi Day under Charles X, and had ended by being manager of the Invalides at the beginning of the July monarchy. Thanks to this fortunate combination of circumstances, one met several great lords, many Orleanists, a certain number of official persons,

and even some republicans of high rank, in this liberal drawing-room, where the Countess, who was an admirable hostess, knew how to attract learned men, writers, artists, and celebrities of all kinds, as well as young and pretty women. As the season was late, the gathering this evening was not large. However, neglecting the unimportant gentlemen whose ancestors had perhaps been fabricated by Père Issacar, Papillon pointed out to his friend a few celebrities. One, with the badge of the Legion of Honor upon his coat, which looked as if it had come from the stall of an old-clothes man, was Forgerol, the great geologist, the most grasping of scientific men; Forgerol, rich from his twenty fat sinecures, for whom one of his confrères composed this epitaph in advance: "Here lies Forgerol, in the only place he did not solicit."

That grand old man, with the venerable, shaky head, whose white, silky hair seemed to shed blessings and benedictions, was M. Dussant du Fosse, a philanthropist by profession, honorary president of all charitable works; senator, of course, since he was one of France's peers, and who in a few years after the Prussians had left, and the battles were over, would sink into suspicious affairs and end in the police courts.

That old statesman, whose rough, gray hairs were like brushes for removing cobwebs, a pedant from head to foot, leaning in his favorite attitude against the mantel decorated only with flowers, by his mulish obstinacy contributed much to the fall of the last monarchy. He was respectfully listened to and called "dear master" by a republican orator, whose red-hot

convictions began to ooze away, and who, soon after, as minister of the Liberal empire, did his best to hasten the government's downfall.

Although Amédée was of an age to respect these notabilities, whom Papillon pointed out to him with so much deference, they did not impress him so much as certain visitors who belonged to the world of art and letters. In considering them the young man was much surprised and a little saddened at the want of harmony that he discovered between the appearance of the men and the nature of their talents. The poet Leroy des Saules had the haughty attitude and the Apollo face corresponding to the noble and perfect beauty of his verses; but Edouard Durocher, the fashionable painter of the nineteenth century, was a large, common-looking man with a huge moustache, like that of a book agent; and Théophile de Sonis, the elegant story-writer, the worldly romancer, had a copper-colored nose, and his harsh beard was like that of a chief in a custom-house.

What attracted Amédée's attention, above all things, were the women—the fashionable women that he saw close by for the first time. Some of them were old, and horrified him. The jewels with which they were loaded made their fatigued looks, dark-ringed eyes, heavy profiles, thick flabby lips, like a dromedary's, still more distressing; and with their bare necks and arms—it was etiquette at Madame Fontaine's receptions—which allowed one to see through filmy lace their flabby flesh or bony skeletons, they were as ridiculous as an elegant cloak would be upon an old crone.

As he saw these decrepit, painted creatures, the young man felt the respect that he should have for the old leave him. He would look only at the young and beautiful women, those with graceful figures and triumphant smiles upon their lips, flowers in their hair, and diamonds upon their necks. All this bare flesh intimidated Amédée; for he had been brought up so privately and strictly that he was distressed enough to lower his eyes at the sight of so many arms, necks, and shoulders. He thought of Maria Gérard as she looked the other day, when he met her going to work in the Louvre, so pretty in her short high-necked dress, her magnificent hair flying out from her close bonnet, and her box of pastels in her hand. How much more he preferred this simple rose, concealed among thorns, to all these too full-blown peonies!

Soon the enormous and amiable Countess came to the poet and begged him, to his great confusion, to recite a few verses. He was forced to do it. It was his turn to lean upon the mantel. Fortunately it was a success for him; all the full-blown peonies, who did not understand much of his poetry, thought him a handsome man, with his blue eyes, and their ardent, melancholy glance; and they applauded him as much as they could without bursting their very tight gloves. They surrounded him and complimented him. Madame Fontaine presented him to the poet Leroy des Saules, who congratulated him with the right word, and invited him with a paternal air to come and see him. It would have been a very happy moment for Amédée, if one of the old maids with camel-like lips,

whose stockings were probably as blue as her eyelids, had not monopolized him for a quarter of an hour, putting him through a sort of an examination on contemporary poets. At last the poet retired, after receiving a cup of tea and an invitation to dinner for the next Tuesday. Then he was once more seated in the carriage with Arthur Papillon, who gave him a slap on the thigh, exclaiming, joyfully:

"Well, you are launched!"

It was true; he was launched, and he will wear out more than one suit of evening clothes before he learns all that this action "going into society," which seems nothing at all at first, and which really is nothing, implies, to an industrious man and artist, of useless activity and lost time. He is launched! He has made a successful début! A dinner in the city! At Madame Fontaine's dinner on the next Tuesday, some abominable wine and aged salmon was served to Amédée by a butler named Adolphe, who ought rather to have been called Exili or Castaing, and who, after fifteen years' service to the Countess, already owned two good paying houses in Paris. At the time, however, all went well, for Amédée had a good healthy stomach and could digest buttons from a uniform; but when all the Borgias, in black-silk stockings and white-silk gloves, who wish to become house-owners, have cooked their favorite dishes for him, and have practised only half a dozen winters, two or three times a week upon him, we shall know more as to his digestion. Still that dinner was enjoyable. Beginning with the suspicious salmon, the statesman with the brush-broom

head, the one who had overthrown Louis-Philippe without suspecting it, started to explain how, if they had listened to his advice, this constitutional king's dynasty would yet be upon the throne; and at the moment when the wretched butler poured out his most poisonous wine, the old lady who looked like a dromedary with rings in its ears, made Amédée—her unfortunate neighbor—undergo a new oral examination upon the poets of the nineteenth century, and asked him what he thought of Lamartine's clamorous debts, and Victor Hugo's foolish pride, and Alfred de Musset's intemperate habits.

The worthy Amédée is launched! He will go and pay visits of indigestion; appear one day at Madame such a one's, and at the houses of several other "Madames." At first he will stay there a half-hour, the simpleton! until he sees that the cunning ones only come in and go out exactly as one does in a booth at a fair. He will see pass before him—but this time in corsages of velvet or satin—all the necks and shoulders of his acquaintances, those that he turned away from with disgust and those that made him blush. Each Madame this one, entering Madame that one's house, will seat herself upon the edge of a chair, and will always say the same inevitable thing, the only thing that can be or should be said that day; for example, "So the poor General is dead!" or "Have you heard the new piece at the Français? It is not very strong, but it is well played!" "This will be delicious;" and Amédée will admire, above all things, Madame this one's play of countenance, when Madame G—— tells

her that Madame B——'s daughter is to marry Madame C——'s nephew. While she hardly knows these people, she will manifest as lively a joy as if they had announced the death of an old aunt, whose money she is waiting for to renew the furniture in her house. And, on the contrary, when Madame D—— announces that Madame E——'s little son has the whooping-cough, at once, without transition, by a change of expression that would make the fortune of an actress, the lady of the house puts on an air of consternation, as if the cholera had broken out the night before in the Halles quarter.

Amédée is launched, I repeat it. He is still a little green and will become the dupe, for a long time, of all the shams, grimaces, acting, and false smiles, which cover so many artificial teeth. At first sight all is elegance, harmony, and delicacy. Since Amédée does not know that the Princess Krazinska's celebrated head of hair was cut from the heads of the Breton girls, how could he suspect that the austere defender of the clergy, M. Lemarguillier, had been gravely compromised in a love affair, and had thrown himself at the feet of the chief of police, exclaiming, "Do not ruin me!" When the king of society is announced, the young Duc de la Tour-Prends-Garde, whose one ancestor was at the battle of the bridge, and who is just now introducing a new style in trousers, Amédée could not suspect that the favorite amusement of this fashionable rake consisted in drinking in the morning upon an empty stomach, with his coachman, at a grog-shop on the corner. When the pretty Baroness des Nénuphars blushed up to her ears because some-

one spoke the word "tea-spoon" before her, and she considered it to be an unwarrantable indelicacy—nobody knows why—it is assuredly not our young friend who will suspect that, in order to pay the gambling debts of her third lover, this modest person had just sold secretly her family jewels.

Rest assured Amédée will lose all these illusions in time. The day will come when he will not take in earnest this grand comedy in white cravats. He will not have the bad taste to show his indignation. No! he will pity these unfortunate society people condemned to hypocrisy and falsehood. He will even excuse their whims and vices as he thinks of the frightful *ennui* that overwhelms them. Yes, he will understand how the unhappy Duc de la Tour-Prends-Garde, who is condemned to hear *La Favorita* seventeen times during the winter, may feel at times the need of a violent distraction, and go to drink white wine with his servant. Amédée will be full of indulgence, only one must pardon him for his plebeian heart and native uncouthness; for at the moment when he shall have fathomed the emptiness and vanity of this worldly farce, he will keep all of his sympathy for those who retain something like nature. He will esteem infinitely more the poorest of the workmen—a wood-sawyer or a bell-hanger—than a politician haranguing from the mantel, or an old literary dame who sparkles like a window in the Palais-Royal, and is tattooed like a Caribbean; he will prefer an old, wrinkled, village grand-dame in her white cap, who still hoes, although sixty years old, her little field of potatoes.

CHAPTER XIII

A SERPENT AT THE FIRESIDE

A LITTLE more than a year has passed. It is now the first days of October; and when the morning mist is dissipated, the sky is of so limpid a blue and the air so pure and fresh, that Amédée Violette is almost tempted to make a paper kite and fly it over the fortifications, as he did in his youth. But the age for that has passed; Amédée's real kite is more fragile than if it had been made of sticks and pieces of old paper pasted on one over another; it does not ascend very high yet, and the thread that sails it is not very strong. Amédée's kite is his growing reputation. He must work to sustain it; and always with the secret hope of making little Maria his wife. Amédée works. He is not so poor now, since he earns at the ministry two hundred francs a month, and from time to time publishes a prose story in journals where his copy is paid for. He has also left his garret in the Faubourg St.-Jacques and lives on the Ile St. Louis, in one room only, but large and bright, from whose window he can see, as he leans out, the coming and going of boats on the river and the sun as it sets behind Nôtre-Dame.

Amédée has been working mostly upon his drama for the Comédie-Française this summer, and it is nearly done; it is a modern drama in verse, entitled *L'Atelier*. The action is very simple, like that of a tragedy, but he believes it is sympathetic and touching, and it ends in a popular way. Amédée thinks he has used for his dialogue familiar but nevertheless poetic lines, in which he has not feared to put in certain graphic words and energetic speeches from the mouths of working-people.

The grateful poet has destined the principal *rôle* for Jocquelet, who has made a successful début in the *Fourberies de Scapin*, and who, since then, has won success after success. Jocquelet, like all comic actors, aspires to play also in drama. He can do so in reality, but under particular conditions; for in spite of his grotesque nose, he has strong and spirited qualities, and recites verses very well. He is to represent an old mechanic, in his friend's work, a sort of faubourg Nestor, and this type will accommodate itself very well to the not very aristocratic face of Jocquelet, who more and more proves his cleverness at "making-up." However, at first the actor was not satisfied with his part. He fondles the not well defined dream of all actors, he wishes, like all the others, the "leading part." They do not exactly know what they mean by it, but in their dreams is vaguely visible a wonderful Almanzor, who makes his first entrance in an open barouche drawn by four horses harnessed *à la* Daumont, and descends from it dressed in tight-fitting gray clothes, tasselled boots, and decorations. This personage is as

attractive as Don Juan, brave as Murat, a poet like Shakespeare, and as charitable as St. Vincent de Paul. He should have, before the end of the first act, crushed with love by one single glance, the young leading actress; dispersed a dozen assassins with his sword; addressed to the stars—that is to say, the spectators in the upper gallery—a long speech of eighty or a hundred lines, and gathered up two lost children under the folds of his cloak.

A "fine leading part" should also, during the rest of the piece, accomplish a certain number of sublime acts, address the multitude from the top of a staircase, insult a powerful monarch to his face, dash into the midst of a conflagration—always in the long-topped boots. The ideal part would be for him to discover America, like Christopher Columbus; win pitched battles, like Bonaparte, or some other equally senseless thing; but the essential point is, never to leave the stage and to talk all the time—the work, in reality, should be a monologue in five acts.

This *rôle* of an old workman, offered to Jocquelet by Amédée, obtained only a grimace of displeasure from the actor. However, it ended by his being reconciled to the part, studying it, and, to use his own expression, "racking his brains over it," until one day he ran to Violette's, all excited, exclaiming:

"I have the right idea of my old man now! I will dress him in a tricot waistcoat with ragged sleeves and dirty blue overalls. He is an apprentice, is he not? A fellow with a beard! Very well! in the great scene where they tell him that his son is a thief and he defies

the whole of the workmen, he struggles and his clothes are torn open, showing a hairy chest. I am not hairy, but I will make myself so—does that fill the bill? You will see the effect."

While reserving the right to dissuade Jocquelet from making himself up in this way, Amédée carried his manuscript to the director of the Théâtre Français, who asked a little time to look it over, and also promised the young poet that he would read it aloud to the committee.

Amédée is very anxious, although Maurice Roger, to whom he has read the piece, act by act, predicts an enthusiastic acceptance.

The handsome Maurice has been installed for more than a year in a studio on the Rue d'Assas and leads a jolly, free life there. Does he work? Sometimes; by fits and starts. And although he abandons his sketches at the first attack of idleness, there is a charm about these sketches, suspended upon the wall; and he will some day show his talent. One of his greatest pleasures is to see pass before him all his beautiful models, at ten francs an hour. With palette in hand, he talks with the young women, tells them amusing stories, and makes them relate all their love-affairs. When friends come to see him, they can always see a model just disappearing behind a curtain. Amédée prefers to visit his friend on Sunday afternoons, and thus avoid meeting these models; and then, too, he meets there on that day Arthur Papillon, who paves the way for his political career by pleading lawsuits for the press. Although he is, at heart, only a very moderate Liberalist, this young man, with the very *chic* side

whiskers, defends the most republican of "beards," if it can be called defending; for in spite of his fine oratorical efforts, his clients are regularly favored with the maximum of punishment. But they are all delighted with it, for the title of "political convict" is one very much in demand among the irreconcilables. They are all convinced that the time is near when they will overthrow the Empire, without suspecting, alas! that in order to do that twelve hundred thousand German bayonets will be necessary. The day after the triumph, the month of imprisonment will be taken into account, and St. Pélagie is not the *carcere duro.* Papillon is cunning and wishes to have a finger in every pie, so he goes to dine once a week with those who owe their sojourn in this easy-going jail to him, and regularly carries them a lobster.

Paul Sillery, who has also made Maurice's acquaintance, loiters in this studio. The amiable Bohemian has not yet paid his bill to Père Lebuffle, but he has cut his red fleece close to his head, and publishes every Sunday, in the journals, news full of grace and humor. Of course they will never pardon him at the Café de Séville; the "long-haired" ones have disowned this traitor who has gone over to the enemy, and is now only a sickening and fetid *bourgeois;* and if the poetical club were able to enforce its decrees, Paul Sillery, like an apostate Jew in the times of the Inquisition, would have been scourged and burned alive. Paul Sillery does not trouble himself about it, however; and from time to time returns to the "Séville" and treats its members to a bumper all around, which he pays for

with the gold of his dishonor. Sometimes Jocquelet appears, with his smooth-shaved face; but only rarely, for he is at present a very busy man and already celebrated. His audacious nose is reproduced in all positions and displayed in photographers' windows, where he has for neighbors the negatives most in demand; for instance, the fatherly and benevolent face of the pope, Pius IX, or the international limbs of Mademoiselle Ketty, the majestic fairy, in tights. The journals, which print Jocquelet's name, treat him sympathetically and conspicuously, and are full of his praises. "He is good to his old aunt," "gives alms," "picked up a lost dog in the street the other evening." An artist such as he, who stamps immortality on all the comic repertory, and takes Molière under his wing, has no time to go to visit friends, that is understood. However, he still honors Maurice Roger with short visits. He only has time to make all the knickknacks and china on the sideboard tremble with the noise of his terrible voice; only time to tell how, on the night before, in the greenroom, when still clothed in Scapin's striped cloak, he deigned to receive, with the coldest dignity, the compliments of a Royal Highness, or some other person of high rank. A prominent society lady has been dying of love for him the past six months; she occupies stage box Number Six—and then off he goes. Good riddance!

Amédée enjoys himself in his friend's studio, where gay and witty artists come to talk. They laugh and amuse themselves, and this Sunday resting-place is the most agreeable of the hard-working poet's recrea-

tions. Amédée prolongs them as long as possible, until at last he is alone with his friend; then the young men stretch themselves out upon the Turkish cushions, and they talk freely of their hopes, ambitions, and dreams for the future.

Amédée, however, keeps one secret to himself; he never has told of his love for Maria Gérard. Upon his return from Italy the traveller inquired several times for the Gérards, sympathized politely with their misfortune, and wished to be remembered to them through Amédée. The latter had been very reserved in his replies, and Maurice no longer broaches the subject in their conversation. Is it through neglect? After all, he hardly knew the ladies; still, Amédée is not sorry to talk of them no longer with his friend, and it is never without a little embarrassment and unacknowledged jealousy that he replies to Maria when she asks for news of Maurice.

She no longer inquires. The pretty Maria is cross and melancholy, for now they talk only of one thing at the Gérards; it is always the same, the vulgar and cruel thought, obtaining the means to live; and within a short time they have descended a few steps lower on the slippery ladder of poverty. It is not possible to earn enough to feed three mouths with a piano method and a box of pastels—or, at least, it does not hold out. Louise has fewer pupils, and Père Issacar has lessened his orders. Mamma Gérard, who has become almost an old woman, redoubles her efforts; but they can no longer make both ends meet. Amédée sees it, and how it makes him suffer!

The poor women are proud, and complain as little as possible; but the decay inside this house, already so modest, is manifested in many ways. Two beautiful engravings, the last of their father's souvenirs, had been sold in an hour of extreme want; and one could see, by the clean spots upon the wall, where the frames once hung. Madame Gérard's and her daughters' mourning seemed to grow rusty, and at the Sunday dinner Amédée now brings, instead of a cake, a pastry pie, which sometimes constitutes the entire meal. There is only one bottle of old wine in the cellar, and they drink wine by the pot from the grocer's. Each new detail that proves his friends' distress troubles the sensitive Amédée. Once, having earned ten louis from some literary work, he took the poor mother aside and forced her to accept one hundred francs. The unfortunate woman, trembling with emotion, while two large tears rolled down her cheeks, admitted that the night before, in order to pay the washerwoman, they had pawned the only clock in the house.

What can he do to assist them, to help them to lead a less terrible life? Ah! if Maria would have it so, they could be married at once, without any other expense than the white dress, as other poor people do; and they would all live together. He has his salary of twenty-four hundred francs, besides a thousand francs that he has earned in other ways. With Louise's lessons this little income would be almost sufficient. Then he would exert himself to sell his writings; he would work hard, and they could manage. Of course it would be quite an undertaking on his part to take all this fam-

ily under his charge. Children might be born to them. Had he not begun to gain a reputation; had he not a future before him? His piece might be played and meet with success. This would be their salvation. Oh! the happy life that the four would lead together! Yes, if Maria could love him a little, if he persisted in hoping, if she had the courage, it was the only step to take.

Becoming enthusiastic upon this subject, Amédée decided to submit the question to the excellent Louise, in whom he had perfect confidence, and considered to be goodness and truth personified. Every Thursday, at six o'clock, she left a boarding-school in the Rue de la Rochechouart, where she gave lessons to young ladies in singing. He would go and wait for her as she came out that very evening. And there he met her. Poor Louise! her dress was lamentable; and what a sad countenance! What a tired, distressed look!

"What, you, Amédée!" said she, with a happy smile, as he met her.

"Yes, my dear Louise. Take my arm and let me accompany you part of the way. We will talk as we walk; I have something very serious to say to you, confidentially—important advice to ask of you."

The poet then began to make his confession. He recalled their childhood days in the Rue Nôtre-Dame-des-Champs, when they played together; it was as long ago as that that he had first begun to be charmed by little Maria. As soon as he became a young man he felt that he loved the dear child, and had always

cherished the hope that he might inspire her with a tender sentiment and marry her some day. If he had not spoken sooner it was because he was too poor, but he had always loved her, he loved her now, and never should love any other woman. He then explained his plan of life in simple and touching terms; he would become Madame Gérard's son and his dear Louise's brother; the union of their two poverties would become almost comfort. Was it not very simple and reasonable? He was very sure that she would approve of it, and she was wisdom itself and the head of the family.

While he was talking Louise lowered her eyes and looked at her feet. He did not feel that she was trembling violently. Blind, blind Amédée! You do not see, you will never see, that she is the one who loves you! Without hope! she knows that very well; she is older than you, she is not pretty, and she will always be in your eyes an adopted elder sister, who once showed you your alphabet letters with the point of her knitting-needle. She has suspected for a long time your love for Maria; she suffers, but she is resigned to it, and she will help you, the brave girl! But this confession that you make, Maria's name that you murmur into her ear in such loving accents, this dream of happiness in which, in your artless egotism, you reserve for her the *rôle* of an old maid who will bring up your children, is cruel, oh! how cruel! They have reached the Boulevard Pigalle; the sun has set, the sky is clear and bright as a turquoise, and the sharp autumn wind detaches the last of the dried leaves from the trees. Amédée

is silent, but his anxious glance solicits and waits for Louise's reply.

"Dear Amédée," said she, raising her frank, pure eyes to his face, "you have the most generous and best of hearts. I suspected that you loved Maria, and I would be glad to tell you at once that she loves you, so that we might hereafter be but one family—but frankly I can not. Although the dear child is a little frivolous, her woman's instinct must suspect your feeling for her, but she has never spoken of it to mamma or to me. Have confidence; I do not see anything that augurs ill for you in that. She is so young and so innocent that she might love you without suspecting it herself. It is very possible, probable even, that your avowal will enlighten her as to the state of her own heart. She will be touched by your love, I am sure, as well as by your devotion to the whole family. I hope, with all my heart, Amédée, that you will succeed; for, I can say it to you, some pleasure must happen in poor Maria's life soon. She has moments of the deepest sadness and attacks of weeping that have made me uneasy for some time. You must have noticed, too, that she is overwhelmed with *ennui*. I can see that she suffers more than mamma or I, at the hard life that we lead. It is not strange that she feels as she does, for she is pretty and attractive, and made for happiness; and to see the present and the future so sad! How hard it is! You can understand, my friend, how much I desire this marriage to take place. You are so good and noble, you will make Maria happy; but you have said it, I am the one who represents wisdom

in our house. Let me have then a few days in which to observe Maria, to obtain her confidence, to discover perhaps a sentiment in her heart of which she is ignorant; and remember that you have a sure and faithful ally in me."

"Take your own time, dear Louise," replied the poet. "I leave everything to you. Whatever you do will be for the best."

He thanked her and they parted at the foot of the Rue Lepic. It was a bitter pleasure for the slighted one to give the young man her poor, deformed, pianist's hand, and to feel that he pressed it with hope and gratitude.

She desired and must urge this marriage. She said this over and over again to herself, as she walked up the steep street, where crowds of people were swarming at the end of their day's work. No! no! Maria did not care for Amédée. Louise was very sure of it; but at all events it was necessary that she should try to snatch her young sister from the discouragements and bad counsel of poverty. Amédée loved her and would know how to make her love him. In order to assure their happiness these two young people must be united. As to herself, what matter! If they had children she would accept in advance her duties as coddling aunt and old godmother. Provided, of course, that Maria would be guided, or, at least, that she would consent. She was so pretty that she was a trifle vain. She was nourishing, perhaps, nobody knew what fancy or vain hope, based upon her beauty and youth. Louise had grave fears. The poor girl, with her thin, bent shoulders wrapped up in an old black shawl, had already

forgotten her own grief and only thought of the happiness of others, as she slowly dragged herself up Montmartre Hill. When she reached the butcher's shop in front of the mayor's office, she remembered a request of her mother's; and as is always the case with the poor, a trivial detail is mixed with the drama of life. Louise, without forgetting her thoughts, while sacrificing her own heart, went into the shop and picked out two breaded cutlets and had them done up in brown paper, for their evening's repast.

The day after his conversation with Louise, Amédée felt that distressing impatience that waiting causes nervous people. The day at the office seemed unending, and in order to escape solitude, at five o'clock he went to Maurice's studio, where he had not been for fifteen days. He found him alone, and the young artist also seemed preoccupied. While Amédée congratulated him upon a study placed upon an easel, Maurice walked up and down the room with his hands in his pocket, and eyes upon the floor, making no reply to his friend's compliments. Suddenly he stopped and looking at Amédée said:

"Have you seen the Gérard ladies during the past few days?"

Maurice had not spoken of these ladies for several months, and the poet was a trifle surprised.

"Yes," he replied. "Not later than yesterday I met Mademoiselle Louise."

"And," replied Maurice, in a hesitating manner, "were all the family well?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" said the artist, in a strange voice, and he resumed his silent promenade.

Amédée always had a slightly unpleasant sensation when Maurice spoke the name of the Gérards, but this time the suspicious look and singular tone of the young painter, as he inquired about them, made the poet feel genuinely uneasy. He was impressed, above all, by Maurice's simple exclamation, "Ah!" which seemed to him to be enigmatical and mysterious. But nonsense! all this was foolish; his friend's questions were perfectly natural.

"Shall we pass the evening together, my dear Maurice?"

"It is impossible this evening," replied Maurice, still continuing his walk. "A duty—I have an engagement."

Amédée had the feeling that he had come at an unfortunate time, and discreetly took his departure. Maurice had seemed indifferent and less cordial than usual.

"What is the matter with him?" said the poet to himself several times, while dining in the little restaurant in the Latin Quarter. He afterward went to the Comédie Française, to kill time, as well as to inquire after his drama of Jocquelet, who played that evening in *Le Legataire Universel.*

The comedian received him in his dressing-room, being already arrayed in Crispin's long boots and black trousers. He was seated in his shirt-sleeves before his toilet-table, and had just pasted over his smooth lips the bristling moustache of this traditional person-

age. Without rising, or even saying "Good-day," he cried out to the poet as he recognized him in the mirror:

"No news as to your piece! The manager has not one moment to himself; we are getting ready for the revival of *Camaraderie*. But we shall be through with it in two days, and then——"

And immediately, talking to hear himself talk, and to exercise his terrible organ, he belched out, like the noise from an opened dam, a torrent of commonplace things. He praised Scribe's works, which they had put on the stage again; he announced that the famous Guillery, his senior in the comedy line, would be execrable in this performance, and would make a bungle of it. He complained of being worried to death by the pursuit of a great lady—"You know, stage box Number Six," and showed, with a conceited gesture, a letter, tossed in among the jars of paint and pomade, which smelled of musk. Then, ascending to subjects of a more elevated order, he scored the politics of the Tuileries, and scornfully exposed the imperial corruption while recognizing that this "poor Badingue," who, three days before, had paid a little compliment to the actor, was of more account than his surroundings.

The poet went home and retired, bewildered by such gossip. When he awoke, the agony of his thoughts about Maria had become still more painful. When should he see Louise again? Would her reply be favorable? In spite of the fine autumn morning his heart was troubled, and he felt that he had no courage. His administrative work had never seemed more loath-

some than on that day. His fellow-clerk, an amateur in hunting, had just had two days' absence, and inflicted upon him, in an unmerciful manner, his stories of slaughtered partridges, and dogs who pointed so wonderfully well, and of course punctuated all this with numerous *Pan-Pans!* to imitate the report of a double-barrelled gun.

When he left the office Amédée regained his serenity a little; he returned home by the quays, hunting after old books and enjoying the pleasures of a beautiful evening, watching, in the golden sky, around the spires of Ste.-Chapelle, a large flock of swallows assembling for their approaching departure.

At nightfall, after dining, he resolved to baffle his impatience by working all the evening and retouching one act of his drama with which he was not perfectly content. He went to his room, lighted his lamp, and seated himself before his open manuscript. Now, then! to work! He had been silly ever since the night before. Why should he imagine that misfortune was in the air? Do such things as presentiments exist?

Suddenly, three light, but hasty and sharp knocks were struck upon his door. Amédée arose, took his lamp, and opened it. He jumped back—there stood Louise Gérard in her deep mourning!

"You?—At my rooms?—At this hour?—What has happened?"

She entered and dropped into the poet's armchair. While he put the lamp upon the table he noticed that the young girl was as white as wax. Then she seized his hands and pressing them with all her strength, she

said, in a voice unlike her own—a voice hoarse with despair:

"Amédée, I come to you by instinct, as toward our only friend, as to a brother, as to the only man who will be able to help us repair the frightful misfortune which overwhelms us!" She stopped, stifled with emotion.

"A misfortune!" exclaimed the young man. "What misfortune? Maria?"

"Yes! Maria!"

"An accident?—An illness?"

Louise made a rapid gesture with her arm and head which signified: "If it were only that!" With her mouth distorted by a bitter smile and with lowered eyes, talking confusedly, she said:

"Monsieur Maurice Roger—yes—your friend Maurice! A miserable wretch!—he has deceived and ruined the unhappy child! Oh! what infamy!—and now—now——"

Her deathly pale face flushed and became purple to the roots of her hair.

"Now Maria will become a mother!"

At these words the poet gave a cry like some enraged beast; he reeled, and would have fallen had the table not been near. He sat down on the edge of it, supporting himself with his hands, completely frozen as if from a great chill. Louise, overcome with shame, sat in the armchair, hiding her face in her hands while great tears rolled down between the fingers of her ragged gloves.

CHAPTER XIV

TOO LATE!

IT had been more than three months since Maria and Maurice had met again. One day the young man went to the Louvre to see his favorite pictures of the painters of the Eighteenth Century. His attention was attracted by the beautiful hair of a young artist dressed in black, who was copying one of Rosalba's portraits. It was our pretty pastel artist whose wonderful locks disturbed all the daubers in the museum, and which made colorists out of Signol's pupils themselves. Maurice approached the copyist, and then both exclaimed at once:

"Mademoiselle Maria!"

"Monsieur Maurice!"

She had recognized him so quickly and with such a charming smile, she had not, then, forgotten him? When he used to visit Père Gérard he had noticed that she was not displeased with him; but after such a long time, at first sight, to obtain such a greeting, such a delighted exclamation—it was flattering!

The young man standing by her easel, with his hat off, so graceful and elegant in his well-cut garments, began to talk with her. He spoke first, in becoming

and proper terms, of her father's death; inquired for her mother and sister, congratulated himself upon having been recognized thus, and then yielding to his bold custom, he added:

"As to myself, I hesitated at first. You have grown still more beautiful in two years."

As she blushed, he continued, in a joking way, which excused his audacity:

"Amédée told me that you had become delicious, but now I hardly dare ask him for news of you. Ever since you have lived at Montmartre—and I know that he sees you every Sunday—he has never offered to take me with him to pay my respects. Upon my word of honor, Mademoiselle Maria, I believe that he is in love with you and as jealous as a Turk."

She protested against it, confused but still smiling.

Ah! if he had known of the dream that Maria had kept concealed in one corner of her heart ever since their first meeting. If he had known that her only desire was to be chosen and loved by this handsome Maurice, who had gone through their house and among poor Papa Gérard's bric-à-brac like a meteor! Why not, after all? Did she not possess that great power, beauty? Her father, her mother, and even her sister, the wise Louise, had often said so to her. Yes! from the very first she had been charmed by this young man with the golden moustache, and the ways of a young lord; she had hoped to please him, and later, in spite of poverty and death, she had continued to be intoxicated with this folly and to dream of this narcotic against grief, of the return of this Prince

Charming. Poor Maria, so good and so artless, who had been told too many times that she was pretty! Poor little spoiled child!

When he left you yesterday, little Maria, after half an hour's pleasing conversation, Maurice said to you jokingly: "Do not tell Violette, above all, that we have met. I should lose my best friend." You not only said nothing to Amédée, but you told neither your mother nor your sister. For Louise and Madame Gérard are prudent and wise, and they would tell you to avoid this rash fellow who has accosted you in a public place, and has told you at once that you are beautiful and beloved. They would scold you; they would tell you that this young man is of a rich and distinguished family; that his mother has great ambitions for him; that you have only your old black dress and beautiful eyes, and to-morrow, when you return to the Louvre, Madame Gérard will establish herself near your easel and discourage the young gallant.

But, little Maria, you conceal it from your mother and Louise! You have a secret from your family! To-morrow when you make your toilette before the mirror and twist up your golden hair, your heart will beat with hope and vanity. In the Louvre your attention will be distracted from your work when you hear a man's step resound in a neighboring gallery, and when Maurice arrives you will doubtless be troubled, but very much surprised and not displeased, ah! only too much pleased. Little Maria, little Maria, he talks to you in a low tone now. His blond

moustache is very near your cheek, and you do well to lower your eyes, for I see a gleam of pleasure under your long lashes. I do not hear what he says, nor your replies; but how fast he works, how he gains your confidence! You will compromise yourself, little Maria, if you keep him too long by your easel. Four o'clock will soon strike, and the watchman in the green coat, who is snoozing before Watteau's designs, will arouse from his torpor, stretch his arms, look at his watch, get up from his seat, and call out "Time to close." Why do you allow Maurice to help you arrange your things, to accompany you through the galleries, carrying your box of pastels? The long, lanky girl in the Salon Carré, who affects the English ways, the one who will never finish copying the "Vierge au coussin vert," has followed you into the Louvre court. Take care! She has noticed, envious creature, that you are very much moved as you take leave of your companion, and that you let your hand remain for a second in his! This old maid *à l'anglaise* has a viper's tongue. To-morrow you will be the talk of the Louvre, and the gossip will spread to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, even to Signol's studio, where the two daubers, your respectful admirers, who think of cutting their throats in your honor, will accost each other with a "Well, the pretty pastellist! Yes, I know, she has a lover."

If it was only a lover! But the pretty pastellist has been very careless, more foolish than the old maid or the two young fellows dream of. It is so sweet to hear him say: "I love you!" and so delicious to lis-

ten for the question: "And you, do you love me a little?" when she is dying to say, "Yes!" Bending her head and blushing with confusion under Maurice's ardent gaze, the pretty Maria ends by murmuring the fatal "Yes." Then she sees Maurice turn pale with joy, and he says to her, "I must talk to you alone; not before these bores." She replies: "But how? It is impossible!" Then he asks whether she does not trust him, whether she does not believe him to be an honest man, and the young girl's looks say more than any protestation would.

"Well! to-morrow morning at ten o'clock—instead of coming to the Louvre—will you? I will wait for you on the Quai d'Orsay, before the Saint-Cloud pier."

She was there at the appointed hour, overwhelmed with emotion and ready to faint. He took her by the arm and led her aboard the boat.

"Do you see, now we are almost alone. Give me the pleasure of wandering through the fields with you. It is such beautiful weather. Be tranquil, we shall return early."

Oh, the happy day! Maria sees pass before her, as she is seated beside Maurice, who is whispering in her ear loving words and whose glances cover her with caresses, as if in a dream, views of Paris that were not familiar to her, high walls, arches of bridges, then the bare suburbs, the smoking manufactories of Grenelle, the Bas Meudon, with its boats and public-houses. At last, on the borders of the stream, the park with its extensive verdure appeared.

They wandered there for a long time under the chestnut-trees, loaded with their fruit in its green shells. The sun, filtering through the foliage, dotted the walks with patches of light, and Maurice continued to repeat to Maria that he loved her; that he had never loved any one but her! that he had loved her from the very first time that he saw her at Père Gérard's, and that neither time nor absence had been able to drive away the remembrance of her. And at this moment he imagined that it was true. He did not think that he was telling a lie. As to poor Maria, do not be too severe upon her! think of her youth, her poverty and imprisonment—she was overwhelmed with happiness. She could think of nothing to say, and, giving herself up into the young man's arms, she had hardly the strength to turn upon him, from time to time, her eyes tortured with love.

Is it necessary to tell how she succumbed? how they went to a restaurant and dined? Emotion, the heavy heat of the afternoon, champagne, that golden wine that she tasted for the first time, stunned the imprudent child. Her charming head slips down upon the sofa-pillow, she is nearly fainting.

"You are too warm," said Maurice. "This bright light makes you ill."

He draws the curtains; they are in the darkness, and he takes the young girl in his arms, covering her hands, eyes, and lips with kisses——

Doubtless he swears to her that she shall be his wife. He asks only a little time, a few weeks, in which to prepare his mother, the ambitious Madame Roger,

for his unexpected marriage. Maria never doubts him, but overcome by her fault, she feels an intense shame, and buries her face on her lover's shoulder. She thinks then, the guilty girl, of her past; of her innocence and poverty, of her humble but honest home; her dead father, her mother and sister—her two mothers, properly speaking—who yet call her "little one" and always consider her as a child, an infant in all its purity. She feels impressed with her sin, and wishes that she might die there at once.

Oh! I beg of you, be charitable to the poor, weak Maria, for she is young and she must suffer!

Maurice was not a rascal, after all; he was in earnest when he promised to marry her without delay. He even meant to admit all to his mother the next day; but when he saw her she never had appeared so imposing to him, with her gray hair under her widow's cap. He shivered as he thought of the tearful scenes, the reproaches and anger, and in his indolence he said to himself: "Upon my honor, I will do it later!" He loves Maria after his fashion. He is faithful to her, and when she steals away an hour from her work to come to see him, he is uneasy at the least delay. She is truly adorable, only Maurice does not like the unhappy look that she wears when she asks him, in a trembling voice: "Have you spoken to your mother?" He embraces her, reassures her. "Be easy. Leave me time to arrange it." The truth is, that now he begins to be perplexed at the idea of this marriage. It is his duty, he knows that very well; but he is not twenty-three years old yet. There is no hurry. After all, is

it duty? the little one yielded easily enough. Has he not the right to test her and wait a little? It is what his mother would advise him, he is certain. That is the only reasonable way to look at it.

Alas, egotists and cowards always have a reason for everything!

How dearly poor Maria's foolish step has cost her! How heavily such a secret weighs upon the child's heart! For a few moments of uneasy intoxication with this man, whom she already doubts and who sometimes makes her afraid, she must lie to her mother without blushing or lowering her eyes, and enter Maurice's house veiled and hiding like a thief. But that is nothing yet. After some time of this agonizing life her health is troubled. Quickly she goes to find Maurice! She arrives unexpectedly and finds him lying upon the sofa smoking a cigar. Without giving him time to rise, she throws herself into his arms, and, bursting into sobs, makes her terrible avowal. At first he only gives a start of angry astonishment, a harsh glance.

"Bah! you must be mistaken."

"I am sure of it, I tell you, I am sure of it!"

She has caught his angry glance and feels condemned in advance. However, he gives her a cold kiss, and it is with a great effort that she stammers:

"Maurice—you must—speak to your mother——"

He rises with an impatient gesture and Maria seats herself—her strength is leaving her—while he walks up and down the room.

"My poor Maria," he begins in a hesitating man-

ner, "I dared not tell you, but my mother will not consent to our marriage—now, at least."

He lies! He has not spoken to his mother; she knows it. Ah! unhappy creature! he does not love her! and, discouraged, with a rumbling noise in her ears, she listens to Maurice as he speaks in his soft voice.

"Oh! be tranquil. I shall not abandon you, my poor child. If what you say is true—if you are sure of it, then the best thing that you can do, you see, is to leave your family and come and live with me. At first we will go away from Paris; you can be confined in the country. We can put the child out to nurse; they will take care of the little brat, of course. And later, perhaps, my mother will soften and will understand that we must marry. No, truly, the more I think of it, the more I believe that that is the best way to do. Yes! I know very well it will be hard to leave your home, but what can you do, my darling? You can write your mother a very affectionate letter."

And going to her he takes her, inert and heart-broken, into his arms, and tries to show himself loving.

"You are my wife, my dear little wife, I repeat it. Are you not glad, eh! that we can live together?"

This is what he proposes to do. He thinks to take her publicly to his house and to blazon her shame before the eyes of everybody! Maria feels that she is lost. She rises abruptly and says to him in the tone of a somnambulist: "That will do. We will talk of it again."

She goes away and returns to Montmartre at a crazy woman's pace, and finds her mother knitting

and her sister ready to lay the table—yes! as if nothing at all was the matter. She takes their hands and falls at their feet!

Ah, poor women!

They had already been very much tried. The decay of this worthy family was lamentable; but in spite of all, yesterday even, they endured their fate with resignation. Yes! the economy, the degrading drudgery, the old, mended gowns—they accepted all this without a murmur. A noble sentiment sustained and gave them courage. All three—the old mother in a linen cap doing the cooking and the washing, the elder sister giving lessons at forty sous, and the little one working in pastels—were vaguely conscious of representing something very humble, but sacred and noble—a family without a blemish on their name. They felt that they moved in an atmosphere of esteem and respect. "Those ladies upon the first floor have so many accomplishments," say the neighbors. Their apartment—with its stained woodwork, its torn wall-paper, but where they were all united in work and drawn closer and closer to each other in love—had still the sweetness of a home; and upon their ragged mourning, their dilapidated furniture, the meagre meat soup at night, the pure light of honor gleamed and watched over them. Now, after this guilty child's avowal, all this was ended, lost forever! There was a blemish upon their life of duty and poverty, upon their irreproachable past, even upon the father's memory. Certainly the mother and elder sister excused the poor creature who sobbed under their kisses and

begged their pardon. However, when they gazed at each other with red eyes and dry lips, they measured the fall of the family; they saw for the first time how frightful were their destitution and distress; they felt the unbearable feeling of shame glide into their hearts like a sinister and unexpected guest who, at the first glance, makes one understand that he has come to be master of the lodging. This was the secret, the overwhelming secret, which the distracted Louise Gérard revealed that evening to her only friend, Amédée Violette, acting thus by instinct, as a woman with too heavy a burden throws it to the ground, crying for help.

When she had ended her cruel confidence, to which the poet listened with his face buried in his hands, and he uncovered his face creased and furrowed by the sudden wrinkles of despair, Louise was frightened.

"How I have wounded him!" she thought. "How he loves Maria!"

But she saw shining in the young man's eyes a gloomy resolution.

"Very well, Louise," muttered he, between his teeth. "Do not tell me any more, I beg of you. I do not know where to find Maurice at this hour, but he will see me to-morrow morning, rest easy. If the evil is not repaired—and at once——"

He did not finish; his voice was stifled with grief and rage, and upon an almost imperious gesture to leave, Louise departed, overcome by her undertaking.

No, Maurice Roger was not a villain. After Maria's

departure he felt ashamed and displeased with himself. A mother! poor little thing! Certainly he would take charge of her and the child; he would behave like a gentleman. But, to speak plainly, he did not now love her as much as he did. His vagabond nature was already tired of his love-affair. This one was watered too much by tears. Bah! he was usually lucky, and this troublesome affair would come out all right like the others. Truly, it was as bad an accident as if one had fallen into a hole and broken his leg. But then, who could tell? Chance and time arrange many things. The child might not live, perhaps; at any rate, it was perfectly natural that he should wait and see what happened.

The next morning the reckless Maurice—who had not slept badly—was tranquilly preparing his palette while awaiting his model, when he saw Amédée Violette enter his studio. At the first glance he saw that the poet knew all.

"Maurice," said Amédée, in a freezing tone, "I received a visit from Mademoiselle Louise Gérard last evening. She told me everything—all, do you understand me perfectly? I have come to learn whether I am mistaken regarding you—whether Maurice Roger is an honest man."

A flame darted from the young artist's eyes. Amédée, with his livid complexion and haggard from a sleepless night and tears, was pitiful to see. And then it was Amédée, little Amédée whom Maurice sincerely loved, for whom he had kept, ever since their college days, a sentiment, all the more precious that it flat-

tered his vanity, the indulgent affection and protection of a superior.

"Oh! Grand, melodramatic words already!" said he, placing his palette upon the table. "Amédée, my dear boy, I do not recognize you, and if you have any explanation that you wish to ask of your old friend, it is not thus that you should do it. You have received, you tell me, Mademoiselle Gérard's confidence. I know you are devoted to those ladies. I understand your emotion and I think your intervention legitimate; but you see I speak calmly and in a friendly way. Calm yourself in your turn and do not forget that, in spite of your zeal for those ladies, I am the best and dearest companion of your youth. I am, I know, in one of the gravest situations of my life. Let us talk of it. Advise me; you have the right to do so; but not in that tone of voice—that angry, threatening tone which I pardon, but which hurts and makes me doubt, were it possible, your love for me."

"Ah! you know very well that I love you," replied the unhappy Amédée, "but why do you need my advice? You are frank enough to deny nothing. You admit that it is true, that you have seduced a young girl. Does not your conscience tell you what to do?"

"To marry her? That is my intention. But, Amédée, do you think of my mother? This marriage will distress her, destroy her fond hopes and ambitions. I hope to be able to gain her consent; only I must have time to turn myself. Later—very soon. I do not say—if the child lives."

This word, torn from Maurice by the cynicism

which is in the heart of all egotists, made Amédée angry.

"Your mother!" exclaimed he. "Your mother is the widow of a French officer who died facing the enemy. She will understand it, I am sure, as a matter of honor and duty. Go and find her, tell her that you have ruined this unfortunate child. Your mother will advise you to marry her. She will command you to do it."

This argument was forcible and direct, and impressed Maurice; but his friend's violence irritated him.

"You go to work badly, Amédée, I repeat it," said he, raising his tone. "You have no right to prejudge my mother's opinion, and I receive no orders from anybody. After all, nothing authorizes you to do it; if it is because you were in love with Maria——"

A furious cry interrupted him. Amédée, with wild eyes and shaking his fists, walked toward Maurice, speaking in a cutting tone:

"Well, yes! I loved her," said he, "and I wished to make her my wife. You, who no longer love her, who took her out of caprice, as you have taken others, you have destroyed all of my dreams for the future. She preferred you, and, understand me, Maurice, I am too proud to complain, too just to hold spite against you. I am only here to prevent your committing an infamy. Upon my honor! If you repulse me, our friendship is destroyed forever, and I dare not think of what will happen between us, but it will be terrible! Alas! I am wrong, I do not talk to you

as I ought. Maurice, there is time yet! Only listen to your heart, which I know is generous and good. You have wronged an innocent child and driven a poor and worthy family to despair. You can repair the evil you have caused. You wish to. You will! I beg of you, do it out of respect for yourself and the name you bear. Act like a brave man and a gentleman! Give this young girl—whose only wrong has been in loving you too much—give the mother of your child your name, your heart, your love. You will be happy with her and through her. Go! I shall not be jealous of your happiness, but only too glad to have found my friend, my loyal Maurice once more, and to be able still to love and admire him as heretofore."

Stirred by these warm words, and fatigued by the discussion and struggle, the painter reached out his hands to his friend, who pressed them in his. Suddenly he looked at Amédée and saw his eyes shining with tears, and, partly from sorrow, but more from want of will and from moral weakness, to end it he exclaimed:

"You are right, after all. We will arrange this matter without delay. What do you wish me to do?"

Ah, how Amédée bounded upon his neck!

"My good, my dear Maurice! Quickly dress yourself. Let us go to those ladies and embrace and console that dear child. Ah! I knew very well that you would understand me and that your heart was in the right place. How happy the poor women will be! Now then, my old friend, is it not good to do one's duty?"

Yes, Maurice found that it was good now; excited and carried away by his friend, he hurried toward the good action that was pointed out to him as he would to a pleasure-party, and while putting on his coat to go out, he said:

"After all, my mother can only approve, and since she always does as I wish, she will end by adoring my little Maria. It is all right; there is no way of resisting you, Violette. You are a good and persuasive Violette. Now, then, here I am, ready—a handkerchief—my hat. Off we go!"

They went out and took a cab which carried them toward Montmartre. The easy-going Maurice, reconciled to his future, sketched out his plan of life. Once married, he would work seriously. At first, immediately after the ceremony, he would leave with his wife to pass the winter in the South, where she could be confined. He knew a pretty place in the Corniche, near Antibes, where he should not lose his time, as he could bring back marine and landscape sketches. But it would not be until the next winter that he would entirely arrange his life. The painter Laugeol was going to move; he would hire his apartment—"a superb studio, my dear fellow, with windows looking out upon the Luxembourg." He could see himself there now, working hard, having a successful picture in the Salon, wearing a medal. He chose even the hangings in the sleeping-rooms in advance. Then, upon beautiful days, how convenient the garden would be for the child and the nurse.

Suddenly, in the midst of this chattering, he noticed

Amédée's sad face as he shrank into the back of the carriage.

"Forgive me, my dear friend," said he, taking him affectionately by the hand. "I forgot what you told me just now. Ah! fate is ridiculous, when I think that my happiness makes you feel badly."

The poet gave his friend a long, sad look.

"Be happy with Maria and make her happy, that is all I ask for you both."

They had reached the foot of Montmartre, and the carriage went slowly up the steep streets.

"My friend," said Amédée, "we shall arrive there soon. You will go in alone to see these ladies, will you not? Oh! do not be afraid. I know Louise and the mother. They will not utter one word of reproach. Your upright act will be appreciated by them as it merits—but you will excuse me from going with you, do you see? It would be too painful for me."

"Yes, I understand, my poor Amédée. As it pleases you. Now then, courage, you will be cured of it. Everything is alleviated in time," replied Maurice, who supposed everybody to have his fickle nature. "I shall always remember the service that you have rendered me, for I blush now as I think of it. Yes, I was going to do a villainous act. Amédée, embrace me."

They threw their arms about each other's neck, and the carriage stopped. Once on the sidewalk, Amédée noticed his friend's wry face as he saw the home of the Gérards, a miserable, commonplace lodging-house, whose crackled plastered front made one

think of the wrinkles on a poor man's face. On the right and on the left of the entrance-door were two shops, one a butcher's, the other a fruiterer's, exhaling their fetid odors. But Amédée paid no attention to the delicate Maurice's repugnance, saying:

"Do you see that little garden at the end of the walk? It is there. *Au revoir.*"

They separated with a last grasp of the hand. The poet saw Maurice enter the dark alley, cross the narrow court and push the gate open into the garden, and then disappear among the mass of verdure. How many times Amédée had passed through there, moved at the thought that he was going to see Maria; and Maurice crossed this threshold for the first time in his life to take her away. He wanted her! He had himself given his beloved to another! He had begged, almost forced his rival, so to speak, to rob him of his dearest hope! What sorrow!

Amédée gave his address to the driver and entered the carriage again. A cold autumn rain had commenced to fall, and he was obliged to close the windows. As he was jolted harshly through the streets of Paris at a trot, the young poet, all of a shiver, saw carriages streaming with water, bespattered pedestrians under their umbrellas, a heavy gloom fall from the leaden sky; and Amédée, stupefied with grief, felt a strange sensation of emptiness, as if somebody had taken away his heart.

When he entered his room, the sight of his furniture, his engravings, his books on their shelves, and his table covered with its papers distressed him. His

long evenings of study near this lamp, the long hours of thought over some difficult work, the austere and cheerless year that he had lived there, all had been dedicated to Maria. It was in order to obtain her some day, that he had labored so assiduously and obstinately! And now the frivolous and guilty child was doubtless weeping for joy in Maurice's arms, her husband to-morrow?

Seated before his table, with his head buried in his hands, Amédée sank into the depths of melancholy. His life seemed such a failure, his fate so disastrous, his future so gloomy, he felt so discouraged and lonely, that for the moment the courage to live deserted him. It seemed to him that an invisible hand touched him upon the shoulder with compassion, and he had at once a desire and a fear to turn around and look; for he knew very well that this hand was that of the dead. He did not fancy it under the hideous aspect of a skeleton, but as a calm, sad, but yet very sweet face which drew him against its breast with a mother's tenderness, and made him and his grief sleep—a sleep without dreams, profound and eternal. Suddenly he turned around and uttered a frightful cry. For a moment he thought he saw, extended at his feet, and still holding a razor in his hand, the dead body of his unhappy father, a horrible wound in his throat, and his thin gray hair in a pool of blood!

He was still trembling with this frightful hallucination when somebody knocked at his door. It was the *concierge*, who brought him two letters.

The first was stamped with the celebrated name

"Comédie Française, 1680." The manager announced in the most gracious terms that he had read with the keenest pleasure his drama in verse, entitled *L'Atelier*, and he hoped that the reading committee would accept this work.

"Too late!" thought the young poet, as he tore open the other envelope.

This second letter bore the address of a Paris notary, and informed M. Amédée Violette that M. Isidore Gaufre had died without leaving a will, and that, as nephew of the defunct, he would receive a part of the estate, still difficult to appraise, but which would not be less than two hundred and fifty or three hundred thousand francs.

Success and fortune! Everything came at once! Amédée was at first overwhelmed with surprise; but with all these unhoped-for favors of fortune, which did not give him the power to repair his misfortune, the noble poet deeply realized that riches and glory were not equal to a great love or a beautiful dream, and, completely upset by the irony of his fate, he broke into a harsh burst of laughter.

CHAPTER XV

REPARATION

THE late M. Violette was not mistaken when he supposed M. Gaufre capable of disinheriting his family in favor of his servant-mistress, but Bérénice was wanting in patience. The rough beard and cap of an irresistible sergeant-major were the ruin of the girl. One Sunday, when M. Gaufre, as usual, recited vespers at St. Sulpice, he found that for the first time in his life he had forgotten his snuff-box. The holy offices were unbearable to this hypocritical person unless frequently broken by a good pinch of snuff. Instead of waiting for the final benediction and then going to take his usual walk, he left his churchwarden's stall and returned unexpectedly to the Rue Servandoni, where he surprised Bérénice in a loving interview with her military friend. The old man's rage was pitiful to behold. He turned the Normandy beauty ignominiously out of doors, tore up the will he had made in her favor, and died some weeks after from indigestion, and left, in spite of himself, all his fortune to his natural heirs.

Amédée's drama had been accepted by the Comédie

Française, but was not to be brought out until spring. The notary in charge of his uncle's estate had advanced him a few thousand francs, and, feeling sad and not having the courage to be present at the marriage of Maurice and Maria, the poet wished at least to enjoy, in a way, his new fortune and the independence that it gave him; so he resigned his position and left for a trip to Italy, in the hope of dissipating his grief.

Ah, never travel when the heart is troubled! You sleep with the echo of a dear name in your thoughts, and the half sleep of nights on a train is feverish and full of nightmares. Amédée suffered tortures from it. In the midst of the continual noise of the cars he thought he could hear sad voices crying loudly the name of a beloved lost one. Sometimes the tumult would become quiet for a little; brakes, springs, wheels, all parts of the furious cast-iron machine seemed to him tired of howling the deafening rhythmical gallop, and the vigorously rocked traveller could distinguish in the diminished uproar a strain of music, at first confused like a groan, then more distinct, but always the same cruel, haunting monotone—the fragment of a song that Maria once sang when they were both children. Suddenly a mournful and prolonged whistle would resound through the night. The express rushed madly into a tunnel. Under the sonorous roof, the frightful concert redoubled, exasperating him among all these metallic clamors; but Amédée still heard a distant sound like that of a blacksmith's hammer, and each heavy blow made his heart bound painfully.

Ah! never travel, and above all, never travel alone,

if your heart is sad! How hostile and inhospitable the first sensation is that one feels then when entering an unknown city! Amédée was obliged to submit to the tiresome delay of looking after his baggage in a commonplace station; the hasty packing into an omnibus of tired-out travellers, darting glances of bad humor and suspicion; to the reception upon the hotel steps by the inevitable Swiss porter with his gold-banded cap, murdering all the European languages, greeting all the newcomers, and getting mixed in his "Yes, sir," "Ja, wohl," and "Si, signor." Amédée was an inexperienced tourist, who did not drag along with him a dozen trunks, and had not a rich and indolent air; so he was quickly despatched by the Swiss polyglot into a fourth-story room, which looked out into an open well, and was so gloomy that while he washed his hands he was afraid of falling ill and dying there without help. A notice written in four languages hung upon the wall, and, to add to his cheerfulness, it advised him to leave all his valuables at the office of the hotel—as if he had penetrated a forest infested with brigands. The rigid writing warned him still further that they looked upon him as a probable sharper, and that his bill would be presented every five days.

The tiresome life of railroads and table-d'hôtes began for him.

He would be dragged about from city to city, like a bag of wheat or a cask of wine. He would dwell in pretentious and monumental hotels, where he would be numbered like a convict; he would meet the same

carnivorous English family, with whom he might have made a tour of the world without exchanging one word; swallowing every day the tasteless soup, old fish, tough vegetables, and insipid wine which have an international reputation, so to speak. But above all, he was to have the horror, every evening upon going to his room, of passing through those uniform and desolate corridors, faintly lighted by gas, where before each door are pairs of cosmopolitan shoes—heavy alpine shoes, filthy German boots, the conjugal boots of my lord and my lady, which make one think, by their size, of the troglodyte giants—awaiting, with a fatigued air, their morning polish.

The imprudent Amédée was destined to all sorts of weariness, all sorts of deceptions, and all the homesickness of a solitary traveller. At the sight of the famous monuments and celebrated sites, which have become in some way looked upon as models for painters and material for literary development, Amédée felt that sensation of "already seen" which paralyzes the faculty of admiration. Dare we say it? The dome in Milan, that enormous quiver of white marble arrows, did not move him. He was indifferent to the sublime medley of bronze in the Baptistery in Florence; and the leaning tower at Pisa produced simply the effect of mystification. He walked miles through the museums and silent galleries, satiated with art and glutted with masterpieces. He was disgusted to find that he could not tolerate a dozen "Adorations of the Shepherds," or fourteen "Descents from the Cross," consecutively, even if they were signed with the most

glorious names. The scenes of suffering and martyrdom, so many times repeated, were particularly distasteful to him; and he took a still greater dislike even to a certain monk, always represented on his knees in prayer with an axe sticking in his tonsure, than to the everlasting St. Sebastian pierced with arrows. His deadened and depraved attention discerned only the disagreeable and ugly side of a work of art. In the adorable artless originals he could see only childish and barbarous drawing, and he thought the old colorists' yolk-of-an-egg tone monotonous.

He wished to spur his sensations, to see something extraordinary. He travelled toward Venice, the noiseless city, the city without birds or verdure, toward that silent country of sky, marble, and water; but once there, the reality seemed inferior to his dream. He had not that shock of surprise and enthusiasm in the presence of St. Mark's and the Doges' palace which he had hoped for. He had read too many descriptions of all these wonders; seen too many more or less faithful pictures, and in his disenchantment he recalled a lamp-shade which once, in his own home, had excited his childish imagination—an ugly lamp-shade of blue pasteboard upon which was printed a nocturnal *fête*, the illuminations upon the ducal palace being represented by a row of pin-pricks.

Once more I repeat it, never travel alone, and above all, never go to Venice alone and without love! For young married people in their honeymoon, or a pair of lovers, the gondola is a floating boudoir, a nest upon the waters like a kingfisher's. But for one who is sad,

and who stretches himself upon the sombre cushions of the bark, the gondola is a tomb.

Toward the last of January, Amédée suddenly returned to Paris. He would not be obliged to see Maurice or his young bride at once. They had been married one month and would remain in the South until the end of winter. He was recalled by the rehearsals of his drama. The notary who had charge of his affairs gave him twelve thousand pounds' income, a large competency, which enabled him to work for the pure and disinterested love of art, and without concessions to common people. The young poet furnished an elegant apartment in an old and beautiful house on the Quai d'Orsay, and sought out some of his old comrades—among others Paul Sillery, who now held a distinguished place in journalism—and reappeared a little in society, becoming very quickly reconciled with life.

His first call was upon Madame Roger. He was very glad to see Maurice's mother; she was a little sad, but indulgent to Maurice, and resigned to her son's marriage, because she felt satisfied that he had acted like a man of honor. He also went at once to Montmartre to embrace Louise and Madame Gérard, who received him with great demonstrations. They were not so much embarrassed in money matters, for Maurice was very generous and had aided his wife's family. Louise gave lessons now for a proper remuneration, and Madame Gérard was able to refuse, with tears of gratitude, the poet's offer of assistance, who filially opened his purse to her. He dined

as usual with his old friends, and they had tact enough not to say too much about the newly married ones; but there was one empty place at the table. He was once more seized with thoughts of the absent, and returned to his room that evening with an attack of the blues.

The rehearsal of his piece, which had just begun at the Comédie Française, the long sittings at the theatre, and the changes to be made from day to day, were a useful and powerful distraction for Amédée Violette's grief. *L'Atelier*, when played the first week in April, did not obtain more than a respectful greeting from the public; it was an indifferent success. This vulgar society, these simple, plain, sentiments, the sweetheart in a calico gown, the respectable old man in short frock and overalls, the sharp lines where here and there boldly rang out a slang word of the faubourg; above all, the scene representing a mill in full activity, with its grumbling workmen, its machines in motion, even the continual puffing of steam, all displeased the worldly people and shocked them. This was too abrupt a change from luxurious drawing-rooms, titled persons, aristocratic adulteresses, and declarations of love murmured to the heroine in full toilette by a lover leaning his elbow upon the piano, with all the airs and graces of a first-class dandy. However, Jocquelet, in the old artisan's *rôle*, was emphatic and exaggerated, and an ugly and commonplace débutante was an utter failure. The criticisms, generally routine in character, were not gracious, and the least surly ones condemned Amédée's attempt, qualifying it as an honorable effort. There were some slashes;

one "long-haired" fellow from the Café de Séville failed in his criticism—the very one who once wrote a description of the violation of a tomb—to crush the author of *L'Atelier* in an ultra-classical article, wherein he protested against realism and called to witness all the silent, sculptured authors in the hall.

It was a singular thing, but Amédée was easily consoled over his failure. He did not have the necessary qualities to succeed in the theatrical line? Very well, he would give it up, that was all! It was not such a great misfortune, upon the whole, to abandon the most difficult art of all, but not the first; which did not allow a poet to act his own free liking. Amédée began to compose verses for himself—for his own gratification; to become intoxicated with his own rhymes and fancies; to gather with a sad pleasure the melancholy flowers that his trouble had caused to blossom in his heart.

Meanwhile summer arrived, and Maurice returned to Paris with his wife and a little boy, born at Nice, and Amédée must go to see them, although he knew in advance that the visit would make him unhappy.

The amateur painter was handsomer than ever. He was alone in his studio, wearing his same red jacket. He had decorated and even crammed the room full of luxurious and amusing knickknacks. The careless young man received his friend as if nothing had happened between them, and after their greetings and inquiries as to old friends, and the events that had happened since their last meeting, they lighted their cigarettes.

"Well, what have you done?" asked the poet. "You had great projects of work. Have you carried out your plans? Have you many sketches to show me?"

"Upon my word, no! Almost nothing. Do you know, when I was there I abandoned myself to living; I played the lizard in the sun. Happiness is very engrossing, and I have been foolishly happy."

Then placing his hand upon his friend's, who sat near him, he added:

"But I owe that happiness to you, my good Amédée."

Maurice said this carelessly, in order to satisfy his conscience. Did he remember, did he even suspect how unhappy the poet had been, and was now, on account of this happiness? A bell rang.

"Ah!" exclaimed the master of the house, joyfully. "It is Maria returning with the baby from a walk in the gardens. This little citizen will be six weeks old to-morrow, and you must see what a handsome little fellow he is already."

Amédée felt stifled with emotion. He was about to see her again! To see her as a wife and a mother was quite different, of course.

She appeared, raising the portière with one hand, while behind her appeared the white bonnet and rustic face of the nurse. No! she was not changed, but maternity, love, and a rich and easy life had expanded her beauty. She was dressed in a fresh and charming toilette. She blushed when she first recognized Amédée; and he felt with sadness that his presence

could only awaken unpleasant recollections in the young woman's mind.

"Kiss each other, like old acquaintances," said the painter, laughing, with the air of a man who is loved and sure of himself.

But Amédée contented himself with kissing the tips of her glove, and the glance with which Maria thanked him for this reserve was one more torture for him to endure. She was grateful to him and gave him a kind smile.

"My mother and my sister," said she, graciously, "often have the pleasure of a visit from you, Monsieur Amédée. I hope that you will not make us jealous, but come often to see Maurice and me."

"Maurice and me!" How soft and tender her voice and eyes became as she said these simple words, "Maurice and me!" Ah, were they not one! How she loved him! How she loved him!

Then Amédée must admire the baby, who was now awake in his nurse's arms, aroused by his father's noisy gayety. The child opened his blue eyes, as serious as those of an old man's, and peeped out from the depth of lace, feebly squeezing the finger that the poet extended to him.

"What do you call him?" asked Amédée, troubled to find anything to say.

"Maurice, after his father," quickly responded Maria, who also put a mint of love into these words.

Amédée could endure no more. He made some pretext for withdrawing and went away, promising that he would see them again soon.

"I shall not go there very often!" he said to himself, as he descended the steps, furious with himself that he was obliged to hold back a sob.

He went there, however, and always suffered from it. He was the one who had made this marriage; he ought to rejoice that Maurice, softened by conjugal life and paternity, did not return to his recklessness of former days; but, on the contrary, the sight of this household, Maria's happy looks, the allusions that she sometimes made of gratitude to Amédée; above all Maurice's domineering way in his home, his way of speaking to his wife like an indulgent master to a slave delighted to obey, all displeased and unmanned him. He always left Maurice's displeased with himself, and irritated with the bad sentiments that he had in his heart; ashamed of loving another's wife, the wife of his old comrade; and keeping up all the same his friendship for Maurice, whom he was never able to see without a feeling of envy and secret bitterness.

He managed to lengthen the distance between his visits to the young pair, and to put another interest into his life. He was now a man of leisure, and his fortune allowed him to work when he liked and felt inspired. He returned to society and traversed the midst of miscellaneous parlors, greenrooms, and Bohemian society. He loitered about these places a great deal and lost his time, was interested by all the women, duped by his tender imagination; always expending too much sensibility in his fancies; taking his desires for love, and devoting himself to women.

The first of his loves was a beautiful Madame, whom

he met in the Countess Fontaine's parlors. She was provided with a very old husband belonging to the political and financial world; a servant of several régimes, who having on many occasions feathered his own nest, made false statements of accounts, and betrayed his vows,. his name could not be spoken in public assemblies without being preceded by the epithet of honorable. A man so seriously occupied in saving the Capitol, that is to say, in courageously sustaining the stronger, approving the majorities in all of their mean actions and thus increasing his own ground, sinecures, tips, stocks, and various other advantages, necessarily neglected his charming wife, and took very little notice of the ridicule that she inflicted upon him often, and to which he seemed predestined.

The fair lady — with a wax doll's beauty, not very young, confining herself to George Sand in literature, making three toilettes a day, and having a large account at the dentist's—singled out the young poet with a romantic head, and rapidly traversed with him the whole route through the country of Love. Thanks to modern progress, the voyage is now made by a through train. After passing the smaller stations, "blushing behind the fan," a "significant pressure of the hand," "appointment in a museum," etc., and halting at a station of very little importance called "scruples" (ten minutes' pause), Amédée reached the terminus of the line and was the most enviable of mortals. He became Madame's lapdog, the essential ornament in her drawing-room, figured at all the dinners, balls, and routs where she appeared, stifled his

yawns at the back of her box at the Opera, and received the confidential mission of going to hunt for sweetmeats and chocolates in the foyer. His recompense consisted in metaphysical conversations and sentimental *séances*, in which he was not long in discovering that his heart was blinded by his emotions. At the end of a few months of this commonplace happiness, the rupture took place without any regrets on either side, and Amédée returned, without a pang, the love-tokens he had received, namely: a photograph, a package of letters in imitation of fashionable romances, written in long, angular handwriting, after the English style, upon very *chic* paper; and, we must not forget, a white glove which was a little yellowed from confinement in the casket, like the beautiful Madame herself.

A tall girl, with a body like a goddess, who earned three hundred francs a month by showing her costumes on the Vaudeville stage, and who gave one louis a day to her hair-dresser, gave Amédée a new experience in love, more expensive, but much more amusing than the first. There were no more psychological subtleties or hazy consciences; but she had fine, strong limbs and the majestic carriage of a cardinal's mistress going through the Rue de Constance in heavy brocade garments, to see Jean Huss burned; and her voluptuous smile showed teeth made to devour patrimonies. Unfortunately, Mademoiselle Rose de Juin's—that was the young lady's theatrical name—charming head was full of the foolishness and vanity of a poor actress. Her attacks of rage when she

read an article in the journals which cut her up, her nervous attacks and torrents of tears when they gave her parts with only fifteen lines in a new piece, had begun to annoy Amédée, when chance gave him a new rival in the person of Gradoux, an actor in the Variétés, the ugly clown whose chronic cold in the head and ugly face seemed for twenty years so delicious to the most refined public in the world. Relieved of a large number of bank-notes, Violette discreetly retired.

He next carried on a commonplace romance with a pretty little girl whose acquaintance he made one evening at a public *fête*. Louison was twenty years old, and earned her living at a famous florist's, and was as pink and fresh as an almond-bush in April. She had had only two lovers, gay fellows—an art student first—then a clerk in a novelty store, who had given her the not very aristocratic taste for boating. It was on the Marne, seated near Louison in a boat moored to the willows on the Ile d'Amour, that Amédée obtained his first kiss between two stanzas of a boating song, and this pretty creature, who never came to see him without bringing him a bouquet, charmed the poet. He remembered Béranger's charming verses, "I am of the people as well, my love!" felt that he loved, and was softened. In reality, he had turned this naïve head. Louison became dreamy, asked for a lock of his hair, which she always carried with her in her *porte-monnaie*, went to get her fortune told to know whether the dark-complexioned young man, the knave of clubs, would be faithful to her for

a long time. Amédée trusted this simple heart for some time, but at length he became tired of her vulgarities. She was really too talkative, not minding her *h*'s and punctuating her discourse with "for certain" and "listen to me, then," calling Amédée "my little man," and eating vulgar dishes. One day she offered to kiss him, with a breath that smelled of garlic. She was the one who left him, from feminine pride, feeling that he no longer loved her, and he almost regretted her.

Thus his life passed; he worked a little and dreamed much. He went as rarely as possible to Maurice Roger's house. Maurice had decidedly turned out to be a good husband, and was fond of his home and playing with his little boy. Every time that Amédée saw Maria it meant several days of discouragement, sorrow, and impossibility of work.

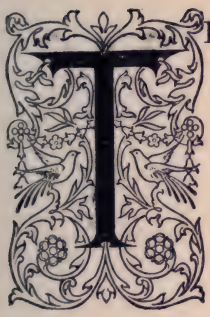
"Well! well!" he would murmur, throwing down his pen, when the young woman's face would rise between his thoughts and his page; "I am incurable; I shall always love her."

In the summer of 1870 Amédée, being tired of Paris, thought of a new trip, and he was upon the point of going again, unfortunate fellow! to see the Swiss porters who speak all the languages in the world, and to view the melancholy boots in the hotel corridors, when the war broke out. The poet's passage through the midst of the revolutionary "beards" in the Café de Séville, and the parliamentary cravats in the Countess's drawing-room, had disgusted him forever with politics. He also was very suspicious of the Liberal min-

isters and all the different phases of the malady that was destroying the Second Empire. But Amédée was a good Frenchman. The assaults upon the frontiers, and the first battles lost, made a burning blush suffuse his face at the insult. When Paris was threatened he asked for arms, like the others, and although he had not a military spirit, he swore to do his duty, and his entire duty, too. One beautiful September morning he saw Trochu's gilded cap passing among the bayonets; four hundred thousand Parisians were there, like himself, full of good-will, who had taken up their guns with the resolve to die steadfast. Ah, the misery of defeat! All these brave men for five months could only fidget about the place and eat carcases. May the good God forgive the timid and the prattler! Alas! Poor old France! After so much glory! Poor France of Jeanne d'Arc and of Napoleon!

CHAPTER XVI

IN TIME OF WAR



THE great siege lasted nearly three months. Upon the thirtieth of November they had fought a battle upon the banks of the Marne, then for twenty-four hours the fight had seemed to slacken, and there was a heavy snow-storm; but they maintained that the second of December would be decisive. That morning the battalion of the National Guard, of which Amédée Violette was one, went out for the first time, with the order simply to hold themselves in reserve in the third rank, by the fort's cannons, upon a hideous plain at the east of Paris.

Truly this National Guard did not make a bad appearance. They were a trifle awkward, perhaps, in their dark-blue hooded cloaks, with their tin-plate buttons, and armed with breech-loading rifles, and encumbered with canteens, basins, and pouches, all having an unprepared and too-new look. They all came from the best parts of the city, with accelerated steps and a loud beating of drums, and headed, if you please, by their major on horseback, a trussmaker,

who had formerly been quartermaster of the third hussars. Certainly they only asked for service; it was not their fault, after all, if one had not confidence in them, and if they were not sent to the front as soon as they reached the fortifications. While crossing the drawbridge they had sung the Marseillaise like men ready to be shot down. What spoiled their martial appearance, perhaps, were their strong hunting-boots, their leather leggings, knit gloves, and long gaiters; lastly, that comfortable air of people who have brought with them a few dainties, such as a little bread with something eatable between, some tablets of chocolate, tobacco, and a phial filled with old rum. They had not gone two kilometres outside the ramparts, and were near the fort, where for the time being the artillery was silent, when a staff officer who was awaiting them upon an old hack of a horse, merely skin and bones, stopped them by a gesture of the hand, and said sharply to their major to take position on the left of the road, in an open field. They then stacked their arms there and broke ranks, and rested until further orders.

What a dismal place! Under a canopy of dull clouds, the earth bare with half-melted snow, with the low fort rising up before them as if in an attitude of defence, here and there groups of ruined houses, a mill whose tall chimney and walls had been half destroyed by shells, but where one still read, in large black letters, these words, "Soap-maker to the Nobility;" and through this desolated country was a long and muddy road which led over to where the battle-

field lay, and in the midst of which, presenting a symbol of death, lay the dead body of a horse.

In front of the National Guard, on the other side of the road, a battalion, which had been strongly put to the test the night before, were cooking. They had retreated as far as this to rest a little, and had spent all that night without shelter under the falling snow. Exhausted, bespattered, in rags, they were dolefully crouched around their meagre green-wood fires; the poor creatures were to be pitied. Underneath their misshapen caps they all showed yellow, wrinkled, and unshaven faces. The bitter, cold wind that swept over the plain made their thin shoulders, stooping from fatigue, shiver, and their shoulder-blades protruded under their faded capes. Some of them were wounded, too slightly to be sent away in the ambulance, and wore about their wrists and foreheads bands of bloody linen. When an officer passed with his head bent and a humiliated air, nobody saluted him. These men had suffered too much, and one could divine an angry and insolent despair in their gloomy looks, ready to burst out and tell of their injuries. They would have disgusted one if they had not excited one's pity. Alas, they were vanquished!

The Parisians were eager for news as to recent military operations, for they had only read in the morning papers—as they always did during this frightful siege—enigmatical despatches and bulletins purposely bristling with strategic expressions not comprehensible to the outsider. But all, or nearly all, had kept their patriotic hopes intact, or, to speak more plainly, their

blind fanatical patriotism, and were certain against all reason of a definite victory; they walked along the road in little groups, and drew near the red pantaloons to talk a little.

"Well, it was a pretty hot affair on the thirtieth, wasn't it? Is it true that you had command of the Marne? You know what they say in Paris, my children? That Trochu knows something new, that he is going to make his way through the Prussian lines and join hands with the helping armies—in a word that we are going to strike the last blow."

At the sight of these spectres of soldiers, these unhappy men broken down with hunger and fatigue, the genteel National Guards, warmly clad and wrapped up for the winter, commenced to utter foolish speeches and big hopes which had been their daily food for several months: "Break the iron circle;" "not one inch, not a stone;" "war to the knife;" "one grand effort," etc. But the very best talkers were speedily discouraged by the shrugging of shoulders and ugly glances of the soldiers, that were like those of a snarling cur.

Meanwhile, a superb sergeant-major of the National Guard, newly equipped, a big, full-blooded fellow, with a red beard, the husband of a fashionable dressmaker, who every evening at the beer-house, after his sixth glass of beer would show, with matches, an infallible plan for blocking Paris and crushing the Prussian army like pepper, and was foolish enough to insist upon it.

"Now then, you, my good fellow," said he, address-

ing an insignificant corporal just about to eat his stew, as if he were questioning an old tactician or a man skilled like Turenne or Davoust; "do you see? you hit it in this affair of day before yesterday. Give us your opinion. Are the positions occupied by Ducrot as strong as they pretend? Is it victory for to-day?"

The corporal turned around suddenly; with a face the color of boxwood, and his blue eyes shining with rage and defiance, he cried in a hoarse voice:

"Go and see for yourselves, you stay-at-homes!"

Saddened and heart-broken at the demoralization of the soldiers, the National Guards withdrew.

"Behold the army which the Empire has left us!" said the dressmaker's husband, who was a fool.

Upon the road leading from Paris, pressing toward the cannon's mouth which was commencing to grumble again in the distance, a battalion of militia arrived, a disorderly troop. They were poor fellows from the departments in the west, all young, wearing in their caps the Brittany coat-of-arms, and whom suffering and privation had not yet entirely deprived of their good country complexions. They were less worn out than the other unfortunate fellows whose turn came too often, and did not feel the cold under their sheepskins, and still respected their officers, whom they knew personally, and were assured in case of accident of absolution given by one of their priests, who marched in the rear file of the first company, with his cassock tucked up and his Roman hat over his eyes. These country fellows walked briskly, a little helter-skelter, like their ancestors in the time of Stofflet and

M. de la Rochejaquelin, but with a firm step and their muskets well placed upon their shoulders, by Ste. Anne! They looked like soldiers in earnest.

When they passed by the National Guard, the big blond waved his cap in the air, furiously shouting at the top of his lungs:

"Long live the Republic!"

But once more the fanatical patriot's enthusiasm fell flat. The Bretons were marching into danger partly from desire, but more from duty and discipline. At the very first shot these simple-minded creatures reach the supreme wisdom of loving one's country and losing one's life for it, if necessary, without interesting themselves in the varied mystifications one calls government. Four or five of the men, more or less astonished at the cry which greeted them, turned their placid, countrified faces toward the National Guard, and the battalion passed by.

The dressmaker's husband—he did nothing at his trade, for his wife adored him, and he spent at cafés all the money which she gave him—was extremely scandalized. During this time Amédée Violette was dreamily walking up and down before the stacks of guns. His warlike ardor of the first few days had dampened. He had seen and heard too many foolish things said and done since the beginning of this horrible siege; had taken part too many times in one of the most wretched spectacles in which a people can show vanity in adversity. He was heartbroken to see his dear compatriots, his dear Parisians, redouble their boasting after each defeat and take their

levity for heroism. If he admired the resignation of the poor women standing in line before the door of a butcher's shop, he was every day more sadly tormented by the bragging of his comrades, who thought themselves heroes when playing a game of corks. The official placards, the trash in the journals, inspired him with immense disgust, for they had never lied so boldly or flattered the people with so much low meanness. It was with a despairing heart and the certitude of final disaster that Amédée, needing a little sleep after the fatigue, wandered through Paris's obscure streets, barely lighted here and there by petroleum lamps, under the dark, opaque winter sky, where the echoes of the distant cannonading unceasingly growled like the barking of monstrous dogs.

What solitude! The poet had not one friend, not one comrade to whom he could confide his patriotic sorrows. Paul Sillery was serving in the army of the Loire. Arthur Papillon, who had shown such boisterous enthusiasm on the fourth of September, had been nominated préfet in a Pyrenean department, and having looked over his previous studies, the former laureate of the university examinations spent much of his time therein, far from the firing, in making great speeches and haranguing from the top of the balconies, in which speeches the three hundred heroes of antiquity in a certain mountain-pass were a great deal too often mentioned. Amédée sometimes went to see Jocquelet in the theatres, where they gave benefit performances for the field hospitals or to contribute to the molding of a new cannon. The actor, wearing a

short uniform and booted to the thighs, would recite with enormous success poems of the times in which enthusiasm and fine sentiments took the place of art and common sense. What can one say to a triumphant actor who takes himself for a second Tyrtée, and who after a second recall is convinced that he is going to save the country, and that Bismarck and old William had better look after their laurels.

As to Maurice Roger, at the beginning of the campaign he sent his mother, wife, and child into the country, and, wearing the double golden stripe of a lieutenant upon his militia jacket, he was now at the outposts near his father's old friend, Colonel Lantz.

Owing to a scarcity of officers, they had fished up the old Colonel from the depths of his engineer's office, and had torn him away from his squares and compasses. Poor old fellow! His souvenirs of activity went as far back as the Crimea and Sebastopol. Since that time he had not even seen a pickaxe glisten in the sun, and, behold, they asked this worthy man to return to the trench, and to powder his despatches with earth ploughed up by bombs, like Junot at Toulon in the fearless battery.

Well, he did not say "No," and after kissing his three portionless daughters on the forehead, he took his old uniform, half-eaten up by moths, from a drawer, shook the grains of pepper and camphor from it, and, with his slow, red-tapist step, went to make his excavators work as far as possible from the walls and close by the Prussians. I can tell you, the men of the auxiliary engineers and the gentlemen with the American

caps had not joked for some time over his African cape or his superannuated cap, which seemed to date from Père Bugeaud. One day, when a German bomb burst among them, and they all fell to the ground excepting Colonel Lantz, who had not flinched. He tranquilly settled his glasses upon his nose and wiped off his splashed beard as coolly as he had, not long since, cleaned his india-ink brushes. Bless me! it gave you a lesson, gentlemen snobs, to sustain the honor of the special army, and taught you to respect the black velvet plastron and double red bands on the trousers. In spite of his appearance of absence of mind and deafness, the Colonel had just before heard murmured around him the words "old Lantz," and "old dolphin." Very well, gentlemen officers, you know now that the old army was composed of good material!

Maurice Roger was ordered from his battalion to Colonel Lantz, and did his duty like a true soldier's son, following his chief into the most perilous positions, and he no longer lowered his head or bent his shoulders at the whistling of a bomb. It was genuine military blood that flowed in his veins, and he did not fear death; but life in the open air, absence from his wife, the state of excitement produced by the war, and this eagerness for pleasure common to all those who risk their lives, had suddenly awakened his licentious temperament. When his service allowed him to do so, he would go into Paris and spend twenty-four hours there, profiting by it to have a champagne dinner at Brebant's or Voisin's, in company with some

beautiful girl, and to eat the luxurious dishes of that time, such as beans, Gruyère cheese, and the great rarity which had been secretly raised for three months on the fifth floor, a leg of mutton.

One evening Amédée Violette was belated upon the boulevards, and saw coming out of a restaurant Maurice in full uniform, with one of the pretty comédinenes from the Variétés leaning upon his arm. This meeting gave Amédée one heart-ache the more. It was for such a husband as this, then, that Maria, buried in some country place, was probably at this very time overwhelmed with fears about his safety. It was for this incorrigible rake that she had disdained her friend from childhood, and scorned the most delicate, faithful, and tender of lovers.

Finally, to kill time and to flee from solitude, Amédée went to the Café de Séville, but he only found a small group of his former acquaintances there. No more literary men, or almost none. The "long-haired" ones had to-day the "regulation cut," and wore divers headgears, for the most of the scattered poets carried cartridge-boxes and guns; but some of the political "beards" had not renounced their old customs; the war and the fall of the Empire had been a triumph for them, and the fourth of September had opened every career for them. Twenty of these "beards" had been provided with préfectures; at least all, or nearly all, of them occupied public positions. There was one in the Government of National Defence, and three or four others, chosen from among the most rabid ones, were members of the Committee

on Barricades; for, improbable as the thing may seem to-day, this commission existed and performed its duties, a commission according to all rules, with an organized office, a large china inkstand, stamped paper, verbal reports read and voted upon at the beginning of each meeting; and, around a table covered with green cloth, these professional instigators of the Café de Séville, these teachers of insurrection, generously gave the country the benefit of the practical experience that they had acquired in practising with the game of dominoes.

The "beards" remaining in Paris were busied with employments more or less considerable in the government, but did not do very much, the offices in which they worked for France's salvation usually closed at four o'clock, and they went as usual to take their appetizers at the Café de Séville. It was there that Amédée met them again, and mixed anew in their conversations, which now dwelt exclusively upon patriotic and military subjects. These "beards" who would none of them have been able to command "by the right flank" a platoon of artillery, had all at once been endowed by some magical power with the genius of strategy. Every evening, from five to seven, they fought a decisive battle upon each marble table, sustained by the artillery of the iced decanter which represented Mount Valerien, a glass of bitters, that is to say, Vinoy's brigade, feigned to attack a saucer representing the Montretout batteries; while the regular army and National Guard, symbolized by a glass of vermouth and absinthe, were coming in solid masses

from the south, and marching straight into the heart of the enemy, the match-box.

There were scheming men among these "beards," and particularly terrible inventors, who all had an infallible way of destroying at a blow the Prussian army, and who accused General Trochu of treason, and of refusing their offers, giving as a reason the old prejudices of military laws among nations. One of these visionary people had formerly been physician to a somnambulist, and took from his pocket—with his tobacco and cigarette papers—a series of bottles labelled: cholera, yellow fever, typhus fever, small-pox, etc., and proposed as a very simple thing to go and spread these epidemics in all the German camps, by the aid of a navigable balloon, which he had just invented the night before upon going to bed. Amédée soon became tired of these braggarts and lunatics, and no longer went to the Café de Séville. He lived alone and shut himself up in his discouragement, and he had never perhaps had it weigh more heavily upon his shoulders than this morning of the second of December, the last day of the battle of Champigny, while he was sadly promenading before the stacked guns of his battalion.

The dark clouds, heavy with snow, were hurrying by, the tormenting rumble of the cannons, the muddy country, the crumbling buildings, and these vanquished soldiers shivering under their rags, all threw the poet into the most gloomy of reveries. Then humanity so many ages, centuries, perhaps, old, had only reached this point: Hatred, absurd war, fratricidal murder!

Progress? Civilization? Mere words! No rest, no peaceful repose, either in fraternity or love! The primitive brute always reappears, the right of the stronger to hold in its clutches the pale cadaver of justice! What is the use of so many religions, philosophies, all the noble dreams, all the grand impulses of the thought toward the ideal and good? This horrible doctrine of the pessimists was true then! We are, then, like animals, eternally condemned to kill each other in order to live? If that is so, one might as well renounce life, and give up the ghost!

Meanwhile the cannonading now redoubled, and with its tragic grumbling was mingled the dry crackling sound of the musketry; beyond a wooded hillock, which restricted the view toward the southeast, a very thick white smoke spread over the horizon, mounting up into the gray sky. The fight had just been resumed there, and it was getting hot, for soon the ambulances and army-wagons drawn by artillery men began to pass. They were full of the wounded, whose plaintive moans were heard as they passed. They had crowded the least seriously wounded ones into the omnibus, which went at a foot pace, but the road had been broken up by the bad weather, and it was pitiful to behold these heads shaken as they passed over each rut. The sight of the dying extended upon bloody mattresses was still more lugubrious to see. The frightful procession of the slaughtered went slowly toward the city to the hospitals, but the carriages sometimes stopped, only a hundred steps from the position occupied by the National Guards, before a house where

a provisionary hospital had been established, and left their least transportable ones there. The morbid but powerful attraction that horrible sights exert over a man urged Amédée Violette to this spot. This house had been spared from bombardment and protected from pillage and fire by the Geneva flag; it was a small cottage which realized the dream of every shopkeeper after he has made his fortune. Nothing was lacking, not even the earthen lions at the steps, or the little garden with its glittering weather-vane, or the rock-work basin for goldfish. On warm days the past summer passers-by might have seen very often, under the green arbor, *bourgeoisie* in their shirt-sleeves and women in light dresses eating melons together. The poet's imagination fancied at once this picture of a Parisian's Sunday, when suddenly a young assistant appeared at an open window on the first floor, wiping his hands upon his blood-stained apron. He leaned out and called to a hospital attendant, that Amédée had not noticed before, who was cutting linen upon a table in the garden:

"Well, Vidal, you confounded dawdler," exclaimed he, impatiently, "are those bandages ready? Good God! are we to have them to-day or to-morrow?"

"Make room, if you please!" said at this moment a voice at Amédée's elbow, who stepped aside for two stretchers borne by four brothers of the Christian doctrine to pass. The poet gave a start and a cry of terror. He recognized in the two wounded men Maurice Roger and Colonel Lantz.

Wounded, both of them, yes! and mortally. Only one hour ago.

Affairs had turned out badly for us down there, then, on the borders of the Marne. They did a foolish thing to rest one day and give the enemy time to concentrate his forces; when they wished to renew the attack they dashed against vast numbers and formidable artillery. Two generals killed! So many brave men sacrificed! Now they beat a retreat once more and lose the ground. One of the chief generals, with lowered head and drooping shoulders, more from discouragement than fatigue, stood glass in hand, observing from a distance our lines, which were breaking.

"If we could fortify ourselves there at least," said he, pointing to an eminence which overlooked the river, "and establish a redoubt—in one night with a hundred picks it could be done. I do not believe that the enemy's fire could reach this position—it is a good one."

"We could go there and see, General," said some one, very quietly.

It was Père Lantz, the "old dolphin," who was standing there with Maurice beside him and three or four of the auxiliary engineers; and, upon my word, in spite of his cap, which seemed to date from the time of Horace Vernet's "Smala," the poor man, with his glasses upon his nose, long cloak, and pepper-colored beard, had no more prestige than a policeman in a public square, one of those old fellows who chase

children off the grass, threatening them with their canes.

"When I say that the German artillery will not reach there," murmured the head general, "I am not sure of it. But you are right, Colonel. We must see. Send two of your men."

"With your permission, General," said Père Lantz, "I will go myself." Maurice bravely added at once:

"Not without me, Colonel!"

"As you please," said the General, who had already pointed his glass upon another point of the battlefield.

Followed by the only son of his companion in arms in Africa and the Crimea, this office clerk and dauber in water-colors walked to the front as tranquilly as he would have gone to the minister's office with his umbrella under his arm. At the very moment when the two officers reached the plateau, a projectile from the Prussian batteries fell upon a chest and blew it up with a frightful uproar. The dead and wounded were heaped upon the ground. Père Lantz saw the foot-soldiers fleeing, and the artillery men harnessing their wagons.

"What!" exclaimed he, rising up to his full height, "do they abandon the position?"

The Colonel's face was transfigured; opening wide his long cloak and showing his black velvet plastron upon which shone his commander's cross, he drew his sword, and, putting his cap upon the tip of it, bareheaded, with his gray hair floating in the wind, with open arms he threw himself before the runaways.

"Halt!" he commanded, in a thundering tone. "Turn about, wretches, turn about! You are here at a post of honor. Form again, my men! Gunners, to your places! Long life to France!"

Just then a new shell burst at the feet of the Colonel and of Maurice, and they both fell to the ground.

Amédée, staggering with emotion and a heart bursting with grief and fear, entered the hospital behind the two litters.

"Put them in the dining-room," said one of the brothers. "There is nobody there. The doctor will come immediately."

The young man with the bloody apron came in at once, and after a look at the wounded man he gave a despairing shake of the head, and, shrugging his shoulders, said:

"There is nothing to be done—they will not last long."

In fact, the Colonel was dying. They had thrown an old woollen covering over him through which the hemorrhage showed itself by large stains of blood which were constantly increasing and penetrating the cloth. The wounded man seemed to be coming out of his faint; he half opened his eyes, and his lips moved.

The doctor, who had just come in, came up to the litter upon which the old officer was lying and leaned over him.

"Did you wish to say anything?" he asked.

The old Colonel, without moving his head, turned

his sad gaze upon the surgeon, oh! so sad, and in a voice scarcely to be heard he murmured:

"Three daughters—to marry—without a dowry! Three—three——!"

Then he heaved a deep sigh, his blue eyes paled and became glassy. Colonel Lantz was dead.

Do not despair, old military France! You will always have these simple-hearted soldiers who are ready to sacrifice themselves for your flag, ready to serve you for a morsel of bread, and to die for you, bequeathing their widows and orphans to you! Do not despair, old France of the one hundred years' war and of '92!

The brothers, who wore upon their black robes the red Geneva cross, were kneeling around the body and praying in a low tone. The assistant surgeon noticed Amédée Violette for the first time, standing motionless in a corner of the room.

"What are you doing here?" he asked him, brusquely.

"I am this poor officer's friend," Amédée replied, pointing to Maurice.

"So be it! stay with him—if he asks for a drink you have the tea there upon the stove. You, gentlemen," added he, addressing the brothers, who arose after making the sign of the cross, "you will return to the battle-field, I suppose?"

They silently bowed their heads, the eldest of them closed the dead man's eyes. As they were all going out together, the assistant surgeon said to them, in a petulant tone of voice:

"Try to bring me some not quite so much used up."

Maurice Roger was about to die, too. His shirt was stained with blood, and a stream ran down from his forehead upon his blond moustache, but he was still beautiful in his marble-like pallor. Amédée carefully raised up one of the wounded man's arms and placed it upon the stretcher, keeping his friend's hand in his own. Maurice moved slightly at the touch, and ended by opening his eyes.

"Ah, how thirsty I am!" he groaned.

Amédée went to the stove and got the pot of tea, and leaned over to help the unfortunate man drink it. Maurice looked at him with surprise. He recognized Amédée.

"You, Amédée!—where am I, then?"

He attemped in vain to rise. His head dropped slightly to the left, and he saw, not two steps from him, the lifeless body of his old colonel, with eyes closed and features already calmed by the first moments of perfect repose.

"My Colonel!" said he. "Ah! I understand—I remember——! How they ran away—miserable cowards! But you, Amédée? Why are you here——?"

His friend could not restrain his tears, and Maurice murmured:

"Done for, am I not?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Amédée, with animation. "They are going to dress your wounds at once—They will come soon! Courage, my good Maurice! Courage!"

Suddenly the wounded man had a terrible chill; his teeth chattered, and he said again:

"I am thirsty!—something to drink, my friend!—give me something to drink!"

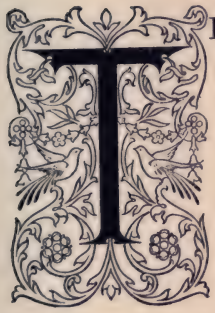
A few swallows of tea calmed him a little. He closed his eyes as if to rest, but a moment after he opened them, and, fixing them upon his friend's face, he said to him in a faint voice:

"You know—Maria, my wife—marry her—I confide them to you—she and my son——"

Then, doubtless tired out by the fatigue of having spoken these words, he seemed to collapse and sink down into the litter, which was saturated now with his blood. A moment later he began to pant for breath. Amédée knelt by his side, and tears fell upon his hands, while between the dying man's gasps he could hear in the distance, upon the battle-field, the uninterrupted rumbling of the cannon as it mowed down others.

CHAPTER XVII

"WHEN YOUTH, THE DREAM, DEPARTS"



THE leaves are falling!

This October afternoon is deliciously serene, there is not a cloud in the grayish-blue sky, where the sun, which has shed a pure and steady light since morning, has begun majestically to decline, like a good king who has grown old after a long and prosperous reign. How soft the air is! How calm and fresh! This is certainly one of the most beautiful of autumn days. Below, in the valley, the river sparkles like liquid silver, and the trees which crown the hill-tops are of a lurid gold and copper color. The distant panorama of Paris is grand and charming, with all its noted edifices and the dome of the Invalides shining like gold outlined upon the horizon. As a loving and coquettish woman, who wishes to be regretted, gives at the moment of departure her most intoxicating smile to a friend, so the close of autumn had put on for one of her last days all her splendid charms.

But the leaves are falling!

Amédée Violette is walking alone in his garden at Meudon. It is his country home, where he has lived

for eight years. A short time after the close of the war he married Maurice's widow. He is walking upon the terrace planted with lindens that are now more than half-despoiled of their leaves, admiring the beautiful picture and thinking.

He is celebrated, he has worked hard and has built up a reputation by good, sincere books, as a poet. Doubtless, some persons are still jealous of him, and he is often treated with injustice, but he is estimated by the dignity of his life, which his love of art fills entirely, and he occupies a superior position in literrature. Although his resources are modest, they are sufficient to exempt him from anxieties of a trivial nature. Living far from society, in the close intimacy of those that he loves, he does not know the miseries of ambition and vanity. Amédée Violette should be happy.

His old friend, Paul Sillery, who breakfasted with him that morning in Meudon, is condemned to daily labor and the exhausting life of a journalist; and when he was seated in the carriage which took him back to Paris that morning, to forced labor, to the article to be knocked off for to-morrow, in the midst of the racket and chattering of an editor's office, beside an interrupted cigar laid upon the edge of a table, he heaved a deep sigh as he thought of Amédée.

Ah, this Violette was to be envied! With money, home, and a family, he was not obliged to disseminate his ideas right and left. He had leisure, and could stop when he was not in the spirit of writing; he could think before he wrote and do some good work. It

was not astonishing, to be sure, that he produced veritable works of art when he is cheered by the atmosphere of affection. First, he adores his wife, that is easily seen, and he looks upon Maurice's little son as his own, the little fellow is so pretty and attractive with his long, light curls. Certainly, one can see that Madame Violette has a never-to-be-forgotten grief, but what a kind and grateful glance she gives her husband! Could anything be more touching than Louise Gérard, that excellent old maid, the life of the house, who has the knack of making pleasing order and elegant comfort reign in the house, while she surrounds her mother, the paralytic Grandmother Gérard, with every care? Truly, Amédée has arranged his life well. He loves and is loved: he has procured for mind and body valuable and certain customs. He is a wise and fortunate man.

While Paul Sillery, buried in the corner of a carriage, allowed himself to be almost carried away by jealousy of his friend, Amédée, detained by the charm of this beautiful day which is drawing to a close, walks with slow, lingering steps under the lindens on the terrace.

The leaves are falling around him!

A very slight breeze is rising, the blue sky is fading a little below; in the nearest Paris suburb the windows are shining in the oblique rays of the setting sun. It will soon be night, and upon this carpet of dead leaves, which crackle under the poet's tread, other leaves will fall. They fall rarely, slowly, but continually. The frost of the night before has blighted

them all. Dried up and rusty, they barely hang to the trees, so that the slightest wind that passes over them gathers them one after another, detaching them from their branches; whirling an instant in the golden light, they at last rejoin, with a sad little sound, their withered sisters, who sprinkle the gravel walks. The leaves fall, the leaves fall!

Amédée Violette is filled with melancholy.

He ought to be happy. What can he reproach destiny with? Has he not the one he always desired for his wife? Is she not the sweetest and best of companions for him? Yes! but he knows very well that she consented to marry him in order to obey Maurice's last wish, he knows very well that Maria's heart is buried in the soldier's grave at Champigny. She has set apart a sanctuary within herself where burns, as a perpetual light, the remembrance of the adored dead, of the man to whom she gave herself without reserve, the father of her son, the hero who tore himself from her arms to shed his blood for his country.

Amédée may be certain of the gratitude and devotion of his wife, but he never will have her love, for Maurice, a posthumous rival, rises between them. Ah, this Maurice! He had loved Maria very little or not very faithfully! She should remember that he had first betrayed her, that but for Amédée he would have abandoned her and she never would have been his wife. If she knew that in Paris when she was far away he had deceived her! But she never would know anything of it, for Amédée has too much delicacy to hurt the memory of the dead, and he respects

and even admires this fidelity of illusion and love in Maria. He suffers from it. The one to whom he has given his name, his heart, and his life, is inconsolable, and he must be resigned to it. Although remarried, she is a widow at the bottom of her heart, and it is in vain that she puts on bright attire, her eyes and her smile are in mourning forever.

How could she forget her Maurice when he is before her every day in her son, who is also named Maurice and whose bright, handsome face strikingly resembles his father's? Amédée feels a presentiment that in a few years this child will be another Maurice, with the same attractions and vices. The poet does not forget that his dying friend confided the orphan to him, and he endeavors to be kind and good to him and to bring him up well. He sometimes has a feeling of sorrow when he discovers the same instincts and traits in the child as in the man whom he had so dearly loved and who had made him such trouble; in spite of all, he can not feel the sentiments of a father for another's son. His own union has been sterile.

Poor Amédée! Yet he is envied! The little joy that he has is mingled with grief and sorrow, and he dares not confide it to the excellent Louise—who suspects it, however—whose old and secret attachment for him he surmises now, and who is the good genius of his household. Had he only realized it before! It might have been happiness, genuine happiness for him!

The leaves fall! the leaves fall!

After breakfast, while they were smoking their cig-

ars and walking along beside the masses of dahlias, upon which the large golden spider had spun its silvery web, Amédée Violette and Paul Sillery had talked of times past and the comrades of their youth. It was not a very gay conversation, for since then there had been the war, the Commune. How many were dead! How many had disappeared! And, then, this retrospective review proves to one that one can be entirely deceived as to certain people, and that chance is master.

Such an one, whom they had once considered as a great prose writer, as the leader of a sect, and whose doctrines of art five or six faithful disciples spread while copying his waistcoats and even imitating his manner of speaking with closed teeth, is reduced to writing stories for obscene journals. "Chose," the fiery revolutionist, had obtained a good place; and the modest "Machin," a man hardly noticed in the clubs, had published two exquisite books, genuine works of art.

All of the "beards" and "long-haired" men had taken unexpected paths. But the politicians, above all, were astonishing in the variety of their destinies. Among the café's frequenters at the hour for absinthe one could count eight deputies, three ministers, two ambassadors, one treasurer, and thirty exiles at Noumea awaiting the long-expected amnesty. The most interesting, everything considered, is that imbecile, that old fanatic of a Dubief, the man that never drank anything but sweetened water; for he, at least, was shot on the barricades by the Versaillese soldiers.

One person of whom the very thought disgusted the two friends was that jumping-jack of an Arthur Papillon. Universal suffrage, with its accustomed intelligence, had not failed to elect this nonentity and bombastic fool, and to-day he flounders about like a fish out of water in the midst of this political cesspool. Having been enriched by a large dowry, he has been by turns deputy, secretary, vice-president, president, head of committees, under secretary of State, in one word, everything that it was possible to be. For the time being he rants against the clergy, and his wife, who is ugly, rich, and pious, has just put their little girl into the Oiseaux school. He has not yet become minister, but rest assured he will reach that in time. He is very vain, full of confidence in himself, not more honest than necessary, and very obtrusive. Unless in the meantime they decide to establish a rotation providing that all the deputies be ministers by turns, Arthur Papillon is the inevitable, necessary man mentioned. In such a case, this would be terrible, for his eloquence would flow in torrents, and he would be one of the most agitating of microbes in the parliamentary culture.

And Jocquelet? Ah! the two friends only need to speak his name to burst into peals of laughter, for the illustrious actor now fills the universe with his glory and ridiculousness. Jocquelet severed the chain some time ago which bound him to the Parisian theatres. Like the tricolored flag, he has made the tour of Europe several times; like the English standard, he has crossed every ocean. He is the modern

Wandering Actor, and the capitals of the Old World and both Americas watch breathless with desire for him to deign to shower over them the manna of his monologues. At Chicago, they detached his locomotive, and he intended, at the sight of this homage proportioned to his merits, to become a naturalized American citizen. But they proposed a new tour for him in old Europe, and out of filial remembrance he consented to return once more among us. As usual, he gathered a cartload of gold and laurels. He was painfully surprised upon reaching Stockholm by water not to be greeted by the squadrons with volleys of artillery, as was once done in honor of a famous cantatrice. Let Diplomacy look sharp! Jocquelet is indifferent to the court of Sweden!

After Paul Sillery's departure Amédée turned over in his mind various other recollections of former days. He has been a trifle estranged from Madame Roger since his marriage to Maria, but he sometimes takes little Maurice to see her. She has sheltered and given each of Colonel Lantz's daughters a dowry. Pretty Rosine Combarieu's face rises up before him, his childhood's companion, whom he met at Bullier's and never has seen since. What has become of the poor little creature? Amédée almost hopes that she is dead. Ah, how sad these old memories are in the autumn, when the leaves are falling and the sun is setting!

It has set, it has plunged beneath the horizon, and suddenly all is dark. Over the darkened landscape in the vast pearl-colored sky spreads the melancholy

chill which follows the farewell of day. The white smoke from the city has turned gray, the river is like a dulled mirror. A moment ago, in the sun's last rays, the dead leaves, as they fell, looked like a golden rain, now they seem a dark snow.

Where are all your illusions and hopes of other days, Amédée Violette? You think this evening of the rapid flight of years, of the snowy flakes of winter which are beginning to fall on your temples. You have the proof to-day of the impossibility of absolutely requited love in this world. You know that happiness, or what is called so, exists only by snatches and lasts only a moment, and how commonplace it often is and how sad the next day! You depend upon your art for consolation. Oppressed by the monotonous *ennui* of living, you ask for the forgetfulness that only the intoxication of poetry and dreams can give you. Alas! Poor sentimentalist, your youth is ended!

And still the leaves fall!

RESTITUTION

RESTITUTION

CHAPTER I

THE HONEST THIEF

H, how cold it was! One could cut the fog with a knife! It was a true Christmas Eve fog, in which, although it was hardly four o'clock, the gas had just been lighted and danced in yellowish flames. The passers looked like fantastic shadows hastening along the pavement, hands in pockets, their coat-collars turned up, and stamping the pavement as if they were angry.

And how they coughed, and how they sneezed! Catarrh reigned supreme in the noisy throng all along the Chaussée d'Antin — *atchou!* The cab-driver, bending forward under his cloak, the milliner's little assistant shivering under her imitation astrakhan, the street-boys warming their hands at the roast-chestnut fire, the gentleman well wrapped in his heavy topcoat —all were suffering from bronchitis or colds in the head. A bitter Christmas indeed! How comforting it is to think that Bethlehem enjoys a temperate climate, and that Christ was born there in a stable, where the breath of an ox or an ass could warm his cold limbs.

Suppose the event had taken place in this frightful climate of Paris at the same time of the year—the time when builders are idlest, when the poor carpenter is divested of everything, especially of wood and coals to keep him warm. A newly born child would have had little chance of life. And would not that have been a pity? For, apart from any idea of religion, and of the doctrine which has comforted mankind for nineteen hundred years, nothing could be more touching than this Christmas festival, this universal joy to celebrate the birth of a child.

On these misty winter days, it is pleasant to remain at home; and, in his humble apartments on the third story of a house in the Rue Clichy, the Abbé Moulin, the old curé of Trinity Church, sat almost asleep, his feet near the fire, reading his breviary. This priest Moulin was indeed an excellent man, but very simple. There was no fear that he would ever set the Seine on fire, but, with his humble faith and candid virtue, he was an exception to the Paris clergy, who have very worldly, not to say sceptical, ideas.

Abbé Moulin had worked principally in the suburbs, and had shown his great charity in these populous districts; in fact, he had given all he possessed—a patrimony of several thousand pounds—to his bel d poor. It was even said that he had contracted some small debts which he found it rather difficult to pay.

And who could censure him? For is not the truest and best kind of socialism that which makes one borrow to relieve misery, and become insolvent to help a fellow-creature?

Abbé Moulin, the old Curé, almost asleep, sat near the fire.

[*From the Original Painting by N. Briganti.*]

Suppose the same had taken place in this frightful climate of Paris at the same time of the year—the time when [illegible] no effect, when the poor carpenter is almost as [illegible] everything, especially of wood and [illegible] to keep out warm. A newly born child would have had little chance of life. And would not that have been a pity? For apart from any idea of religion, and of the Saviour who has comforted mankind for nineteen hundred years, nothing could be more touching than this Christmas festival, this universal joy to welcome the birth of a child.

On these rainy winter days, it is pleasant to remain at home, and, in his humble apartments on the third story of a house in the Rue Clichy, the Abbé Moulin, the old cure of Trinity Church, sat almost asleep, his feet near the fire, reading his breviary. This priest Moulin, [illegible] an excellent man, but very simple. There was no fear that he would ever set the Seine on fire, but, with his humble faith and candid virtue, he was an exception to the Paris clergy, who have very worldly, not to say sceptical, ideas.

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[From the Original Painting by N. Bigeault.]

N. Brigatti

Those in high places, though they smiled at him, esteemed him; and when he became penniless he got appointed to the curacy of the rich parish of Trinity, where, at least, there was no fear of his dying of hunger, as he was sure of having many invitations to dinner. He did not object to this good fortune, but ran at once to thank the archbishop, and made arrangements to dine every week with a stock-broker, with an auctioneer whose wife was pious, and also with an actress who had had to leave the stage on account of her obesity and had turned to religion. The poor old Abbé did not care much about the pleasures of the table, and was all the time inwardly regretting his old parishioners—the ragpickers of the Butte aux Cailles, whom he used to go to visit at dusk, carrying a basketful of sugar, coffee, woollen stockings, knitted waistcoats, medicines, etc.—and every morning on waking he tenderly contemplated, on the wall of his bedroom, a crucifix made of mussel-shells, a dear keepsake presented by his ragpickers.

The character of this humble priest was soon read by his vicar, a proud man of fifty years of age, with the high notions of a prelate or a great lord, who prided himself on the striking likeness he bore to the comedian Bressant. The Abbé Moulin was a dull preacher, and was soon removed from the pulpit; consequently all the most disagreeable and worrying duties fell to his share—catechism, funerals, and the very early and very late masses. His penitents were those disliked and discarded by his fellow-priests; and his evangelical patience was sorely tried by having to listen to the

secret complaints of maids against their mistresses, and of the mistresses against the maids. But he was one of those sincere Christians who take all their troubles to God.

To speak thus kindly of a Catholic priest may cause the Freemasons who read this book to think me a priest-ridden creature. To them I frankly admit that I consider the Abbé Moulin a very weak-minded man, as he believed implicitly in the Immaculate Conception and the infallibility of the Pope.

Sitting dozing by the fire, the Abbé Moulin forgot for a while his open breviary, near the lamp, and, letting his thoughts wander toward his old parishioners, the ragpickers of Butte aux Cailles, who were so destitute and as numerous as rabbits, he recalled that last Christmas, when he was still among them, he had sold all his little stock so that he might be able to give the children a few presents of boots and linen; this year his purse was empty, and all brightness had gone from his life. At the last dinner given by the auctioneer's wife, when there were such splendid crawfish at table, and at the ex-actress's, where Léoville of '74 was the sole drink, and truffles were found in every dish, the good old priest had tried to make a charitable appeal in behalf of the little ragpickers; but he had done it clumsily. When, in order to create pity among his hearers, he deplored the number of girl-mothers in the poorer classes, they pursed up their lips; and when he spoke to the actress of the epidemic raging among the children of the districts of Mouffetard and Gentilly, she exclaimed, "How horrible!" and nearly fainted

with disgust. After that the dinner lost all flavor. He could not help thinking how he should have liked to give one of the platefuls of pastry to the marine-store dealer's five little orphans who were living with their grandmother; and how much more poor little Céleste, who was slowly dying from anæmia at thirteen years of age, needed the Léoville of 1874 than the over-fed singer, who seemed in danger of bursting from excess of good living. Then he thought of Alexandrine, the worker in imitation pearls, and of Josiah, the peat-maker, who were engaged to be married, and unless the Abbé Moulin, who had prepared them both for their first communion, got them a few hundred francs to begin housekeeping, it was quite likely that the loving pair would dispense with the ceremony of marriage.

The old priest had got thus far in his melancholy musings when he was disturbed by a violent ringing at his door. Having no servant—he made his own bed and got the doorkeeper to sweep his room now and then—he went to open the door himself, and was confronted by a tall, powerful, jovial man wearing a cloak with a double cape, and a felt hat with a wide brim, who was remarkable chiefly for his determined look and long gray beard; the upper lip was close-shaven in American fashion.

"Have I the honor of saluting the Reverend Abbé Moulin?" said the visitor, taking off his hat.

"Yes, Monsieur," replied the priest.

"I am Adam Harrison, of Chicago, a dealer in salt pork, and I wish to have a short interview with you. Don't be afraid of my long beard and informal appear-

ance," he added, to reassure the curé, who was a little surprised by this unexpected visit. "The little service I ask of you, you will, I hope, render very readily, and in return I shall not forget your poor."

By these words the unknown man at once obtained the good graces of the priest, who hastened to conduct him to his sitting-room, and gave him a chair near the fire. "Let us sit down, Monsieur," said he, with a smile; "and kindly let me know in what way I can be useful to you." The so-called American sat down, threw his hat on the carpet, unbuttoned his ulster, crossed his legs—he wore heavy, double-soled boots—and after stroking his beard said abruptly: "Do you really take me for a Yankee?"

Suddenly the Abbé noticed that the stranger had no foreign accent. "Well——" said the priest, feeling embarrassed.

"Well," replied the stranger, "the fact is that, although I sell salt pork and live in Chicago, I have just arrived by the express direct from Havre. My name is not Adam Harrison. I will reveal all to you. I am Renaudel, the ex-banker of the Faubourg Saint Honoré, who, in 1886, ran away with the cash-box, and was condemned to twenty years of hard labor for forgery and breach of trust."

Amazed, and with some feeling of repugnance, the good priest moved a little away from him.

"You never have seen me before, reverend father," said the stranger, "but you were aware of my existence, as you used to be my wife's confessor. Had she lived, I should have remained an honest man. I had been a

widower three years when I disgraced myself. No doubt you have heard of my crime and of my condemnation?"

The priest nodded affirmatively.

"I also knew you, although I never had seen you. My poor Julia had often spoken to me of her friend the Abbé Moulin, the ragpickers' priest. So, feeling that you are incapable of betraying me, I come to you in all confidence. Have I done wrong?" On putting this question the pretended American, who looked more like a tramp, ready to use a knife or a revolver, than a banker, fixed his steely gray eyes steadfastly on the priest.

The Abbé did not seem at all flattered at the confidence reposed in him by such a person, and hardly knew what to reply.

"Assuredly," he murmured, "you need not fear me. My holy office, my priestly character, make unbounded charity a duty. But what can I do for you?"

Renaudel smiled at the uneasiness of the simple priest.

"Now, Monsieur l'Abbé, admit that this visit is anything but a pleasure to you, and that you look upon me as an impudent rascal?"

"You may smile, Monsieur," replied the priest, a little warmly, notwithstanding his natural timidity, "but why should I not remember that you were guilty of a very great crime, and that you did a great deal of harm?"

"And if I have come to repair it?" exclaimed the ex-banker, drawing a pocketbook from an inside

pocket, and placing it on the table near the Abbé's breviary. "In this pocketbook," continued Renaudel, in a firm tone, "are four drafts on some of the safest and most honorable houses in Paris, for the amount of two million, two hundred and eighty-three thousand, one hundred and fifty-three francs—I spare you the centimes. This capital, which includes the interest, will pay exactly those whom I have wronged. There is sufficient to satisfy my four largest creditors. With the smaller ones I have already managed to settle, for it seemed to me that the poorer people had the first claim—they were most to be pitied. I'll tell you now what I wish you to do. You are to take this pocketbook. I'll give you a list of my creditors, with their addresses—which I found out in Chicago through a private inquiry office. You are to leave me alone here poking your fire, and, if you permit it, smoking some cigars. No one will think of coming here to arrest an escaped forger. You will enter the carriage at the door—the cabman has already had in advance a louis as a tip. Then go and call upon the four persons (your dress permits you to go anywhere), hand them the drafts, without saying I am in Paris, or how you got them, wait for the receipts—they are in the portfolio, lacking only signature—then come back with them to me. I shall go by the same carriage to the station of Saint-Lazare, where I can take the midnight express for Havre. To-morrow morning the steamer La Normandie will leave at half-past nine, conveying your humble servant back to the New World! And you will have a thousand francs for your poor."

The Abbé Moulin was thunderstruck. We know that he was not very strong-minded, and the events now taking place would turn a stronger brain than his. So many startling events taking place in so short a time! There were a thief and himself, sitting together by his fireside, and talking like two old friends! And this thief had come especially to Paris to refund millions of francs that he owed; and was offering him a thousand francs for his poor!

This thousand francs would give a midnight Christmas supper to the ragpickers of the Butte aux Cailles; it would clothe the five orphans of the Rue Croulebarbe—allowing twenty francs for each of them; he could also get the cod-liver oil and quinine wine for little Céleste; and, better than all, the marriage of the peat-man and the worker in imitation pearls could now be celebrated. It was all too good to be true! It was like a fairy-tale! The old priest thought he must be dreaming. But, no! it was quite real! There was the man with the long beard in his sitting-room, asking him once more: "Does that arrangement suit you?"

"Can you ask me such a question?" exclaimed the priest. "Of course I am ready to help you to make amends for the misfortunes you have caused, and to restore their fortunes to the people you have ruined! And this act of charity—so generous on your part! So admirable—I am ready." Suddenly a scruple stopped the good priest: How had this stranger come to possess all this money? Dishonestly, no doubt! It was stained with blood, perhaps! Who knew

whether this ex-banker, with his ruffian's face, had not, dagger in hand and followed by a band of red-skinned savages, adorned with eagles' feathers, and with rings in their noses, robbed the travellers on the transcontinental train?

"But, pardon me, would you permit me to ask you an almost impertinent question?" stammered the Abbé Moulin. "These two millions—how did you get them?"

"Very honestly," replied Renaudel, without hesitation. "In the American fashion—by dint of work, audacity, and will. I have acquired these two millions, and some reserve funds I possess yonder for my business, by dealings in salt pork. I said just now that I ran away with the cash-box; I made a mistake, I only bolted when the coffers were quite empty. How did I stoop to all this? Fancy a man adoring his wife, and losing her. He tries to drown grief, and falls into vice. You can imagine all the foolish expenses. Oh, what sums I spent on that delightful little actress of the Comédie Française who used to say so innocently, 'The little cat is dead,' in the *School for Wives!* You yourself would have believed in her. And then, when one has made away with his clients' money, there is the exchange, where it is double or quits. I lost—but we won't talk of that! The day I landed in New York with my little boy, eight years of age (my wife had died at his birth), I had only twenty francs in my pocket. I assure you it was not by robbery I began to rebuild my fortunes. My money is stainless. I see, however, some doubt in your eyes. Speak openly to me."

"Well," said the Abbé, "pardon me if I offend you, but you do not seem to me to be repentant. I can not make out how you have decided upon the restitution of the money."

"You don't offend me," replied Renaudel. "Last year I did not think of paying back my creditors. I was living under the name of Harrison—telling everyone I was an Englishman brought up in Marseilles. I had done with old Europe—the cable was cut—my skin was changed! Fortune smiled on me. I soon possessed a very big capital. I said to myself: 'All is well!—Renaudel is dead! Long live Harrison!' No, I was not a repentant sinner; so quickly, indeed, do we forget the past. I regret to make this confession, but I no longer believe in God or in the devil. If honesty has been awakened in me, it is owing to the Christmas festival."

The old priest was amazed.

"Those feasts have a great importance in English-speaking countries; and at the midnight festivities of last year, the wife of a Chicago merchant, with whom I do a great deal of business, had prepared an entertainment for the children. I took my little Victor there, for, you must know, Monsieur l'Abbé, though all my other good sentiments have vanished, paternal love has remained.

"I adore my son. He reminds me of my poor Julia and of my happy time. He is eight years of age and I take great care of him. I took him to this party and he helped, with the other boys, to strip the fir tree loaded with sweets and toys. I looked on, sipping my

tea, feeling happy in his mirth. Although I am without religion, I could not help reflecting on the delights of Christian society procured by this feast—this children's feast in which the happiness of the young seemed to communicate innocence to the men of ripe age, or to old men who have more or less lost it. For the first time after many years—since I began my feverish existence of a gambler and a rake, or my new life of very hard work—I felt something sweet and yet bitter softening my heart.

"At this moment, my boy, my little Toto, tired of playing and laughing, came and sat on my knee and settled himself to sleep. I had prepared a fine surprise for him for the next morning. I said: 'Dear boy, don't forget, before going to bed, to put your shoes in the chimney.' He opened his eyes languidly, saying, 'Oh, no fear! Do you know, papa, what I should like Christmas to bring me? A box of leaden soldiers! You know, soldiers in red trousers, as I used to see them alive in the garden, where my nurse used to take me when I was very little—you remember the big garden opposite the street, with the arcades, with statues and trees in green cases—do you recollect? When I wore petticoats like a little girl, and my name was Toto Renaudel.' He fell asleep after that word. I was startled, and a sudden shiver passed through me. Thus Victor, hardly four years of age at the time of our flight, remembered his childhood; he recollected the name I had dishonored. Ah! Abbé Moulin, I spent that night in meditation—in watching by his bed. I then said to myself that I, the unpunished

criminal, was enjoying a happiness of which I was not worthy, and that one day, no doubt, retribution would reach me through this child. I reflected that, as Victor had not forgotten his true name, the slightest chance would suffice to inform him that it was the name of an unpunished robber. The thought that my son would have to blush for my crimes—that he would abhor me—was an intolerable burden: then I swore to myself that I would return all that I had stolen, with compound interest, and get receipts. Victor may be told one day that his father was a thief. I shall then be able to answer: 'Yes, but I have restored all the money.' I may then be pardoned. I resolved to sell all that I possessed. Alas! the total was still very far from the amount of my debt. During the last year I have worked very hard, and to-day I can pay everybody. I have still in reserve a few thousand dollars. Yes, my dear son, I shall build up another fortune for you!"

The Abbé Moulin kept his eyes fixed on Renaudel, who had become affected and excited, and, strange to say, at the end of his recital, two big tears trickled down on his beard. Another priest would have seized this occasion to give him a little sermon, but the Abbé Moulin who, we know, was not an eagle, and was fully conscious of his deficiency as an orator, acted with all the tact of a delicate heart. He got up and extended his hand to Renaudel. "I am ready to start," said the good priest; "kindly give me your last instructions; I must inform you, however, that I must be in Trinity Church for the midnight mass."

"That is the very time for my train," replied Renaudel, who gave the priest a hearty hand-clasp. "The Havre express starts at twelve. I don't want to miss it, for I dislike the air of Paris. I have only come to find a trustworthy confidant. I have found it in you. Thanks, Abbé Moulin, pray bring me back the receipts. The sum is more than two million francs: it is dinner-time; every one is sure to be at home, so you can arrange matters easily.

"Here is the list," he added, "four visits to pay: Louis Dublé, a writer, Rue des Abbesses—a draft of two hundred and fifty-one thousand, three hundred and ninety francs. At the time of my flight he was a young man, with long hair and neglected nails; I have heard he has had some successes. If he has kept to his old habits, the literary cafés of Paris will derive some benefit from him. Mademoiselle Letourneur; lives in Rue du Cardinal Lemoine. By Jove, that's a good distance. She keeps a small day school, and is an imaginary invalid—a draft for three hundred and sixty-five thousand, four hundred and forty-nine francs. I suppose she will buy some more boxes of pills and change her mineral waters. Henri Burtal, architect, Rue de Rennes. He was a fine young man—too fond of women—a draft for five hundred and sixty-seven thousand, eight hundred and ninety-nine francs—married since I left. It will do later for the dowry of his daughters. Now, the last, my most sorely tried victim, the Marquis de Capdecamp, member of the Jockey Club, Boulevard Malesherbes. He had ancestors at Agincourt, Pavia, Malplaquet, Rosbach. His family have contributed

many soldiers to lost battles; he was a good horseman, but a true *blasé;* he squandered a large fortune five years ago—married also—my theft made him, so I was told, regild his escutcheon with the dowry of Mademoiselle Murdock, daughter of a doubtful financier. I'm sure he will be agreeably surprised by this draft of a million, seven hundred and eight thousand, four hundred and twenty-one francs.

"Kindly tell these people I don't wish to remain in Paris to be acquitted by a jury. Tell them, if you like, that Renaudel has changed his name and lives abroad. Ask the receipts from them that I may, when required, show them to my son Victor. It is already half-past five. Once again, I thank you."

Renaudel rose, took the lamp, led the Abbé Moulin into the ante-chamber, helped him to put on his warm topcoat, and wished him good luck.

He sat down by the fire, lighted a large cigar, and puffed like a steamer under full headway.

CHAPTER II

THE DWELLING OF A POET

WITHOUT, the fog had become very thick and icy, and it had an abominable odor of soot. Thanks to the light of the lantern in the carriage, the Abbé was able to decipher the addresses, and he gave the first on the list to the coachman. As soon as the door was closed, the man whipped up his horse, which was smoking like the vapor from sulphurous soil, and away they went.

The old priest, shivering in the draughts in spite of the closed windows, did not mind the odor of rotten straw, stale tobacco, and damp cloth. He felt too happy, with this precious pocketbook pressed tight to his breast. His mission was sweet. He was about to give happiness and comfort to others.

It is but a short distance from the Rue de Clichy to Montmartre; there was a glimpse of the wings of the Moulin Rouge concert-room, then the cab dashed through the thick fog, went slowly up the Rue Lepic, and stopped in the Rue des Abbesses.

"Monsieur Louis Dublé?" demanded the Abbé, opening the door of the concierge, from which escaped the perfume of a *ragout* such as the Baron de Rothschild never had tasted.

"On the fifth floor, door opposite to you," answered a sort of Macbeth witch, wearing a linen cap, and a beard like a *chasseur* of Vincennes. She was leaning over a large kettle in which simmered an Irish stew, a dish which *concierges* alone know how to cook, and which the habitués of the Café Anglais would find very palatable indeed. The poor appearance of the door-keeper, the disorder of her room, and the wretched light along the stairs pleased the old priest amazingly. No doubt it was to a poor poet he was bringing the money. On the fifth floor, bravo! He had but vague classical recollections of the life of men of letters. He felt sure of seeing a garret like Malfilatre's, where he should find Louis Dublé lying upon a straw bed, without fire, and armed with paper and pencil; his dishevelled hair, shirt open at the breast, and eyes rolling like those of an epileptic showing how deep was his inspiration. Abbé Moulin's guide upon this point was some engraved portraits of the eighteenth century, which he had hastily looked at in some of the windows of the Quai Malaquais. Who knows that he did not imagine an odor of carbonic acid on the landing, and hasten his steps to be in time to break open the door, and save the poet from despair and asphyxia? At any rate, notwithstanding his asthma, he went up the stairs briskly. But the fifth landing was not the last, and he felt annoyed at finding a rather respectable-looking place.

He rang the bell. The door was opened by an elegantly dressed young man—Louis Dublé himself. He was in evening dress, with a white cravat, for he was

going to attend the first performance of a play, and dine early at a restaurant. As soon as the priest gave his name, Louis Dublé introduced him into a large room, formerly a painter's studio, prettily and simply furnished; the walls were covered with books, a lamp threw a light over a quantity of paper scattered upon a large table, and a bright wood fire gave a pleasant, warm atmosphere to the room; everything gave evidence of long hours of calm and careful study.

The Abbé Moulin, more and more astonished, gave up thinking of the misery of Gilbert and Chatterton.

"To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit?" asked Louis Dublé, sitting in a large mediæval armchair, looking like the president of a club where cheating is going on.

Every man, even the best and simplest, is at heart something of an actor.

"After all," said the priest to himself, "I am bringing this so-called poet, who is not poor and receives me with such icy politeness, more than a quarter of a million of francs." And a little unconsciously the worthy pastor tried to produce some kind of dramatic effect.

He took from his cassock a snuff-box, a string of beads, a few pence, his spectacle-case, and the famous pocketbook; he took from the latter the draft made payable to Louis Dublé, and handed it to him. "The cause of my visit, Monsieur," said he, with a sweet smile, "is simply to give you this, and to get your receipt, of course."

"What! Can it be possible!" exclaimed the poet.

"Two hundred and fifty-one thousand, three hundred and ninety francs in one draft, on the Crédit Foncier —and in my name! What does it mean? Are you playing a trick on me?"

"Not at all," said the priest, "it simply means that Monsieur Renaudel——"

"My old banker! That infamous robber!"

"Has become remorseful, Monsieur, and wishes to reimburse to his creditors all that he took from them, with compound interest."

"What! This enormous sum! All my fortune and even more——"

"Is restored by Renaudel, whose only thought is to set his conscience at rest; and who has forbidden me to say anything more about him."

"Why! we must be in a land of dreams. This rascal has then become an honest man?" Louis Dublé laughed nervously.

"He is a debtor who pays his debts, Monsieur, that is all," said the priest, earnestly.

He felt annoyed at the remarks of this young man—over-dressed, like a diplomatic clerk of the Quai d'Orsay. It was too much for the good priest, after his thoughts on the staircase. No garret. No broken pitcher. No trestle bed. No dog licking the hand of a dying poet. Instead, this Louis Dublé, with a contented smile, saying: "This has not made my heart quicken by a single beat, but I am very pleased."

At last, noticing the dissatisfied air of his visitor, he continued:

"You are surprised, Monsieur, that I don't show

more delight. You would like to be able to tell Renaudel that you had seen me go almost mad with joy. I should be acting a falsehood were I to cover this paper with kisses, for my pleasure is mixed with perplexity. Thanks to this money, I shall be more free; I shall no longer be compelled to write two articles a week, to insure my existence. I can begin to write a modern drama, the subject of which is haunting me. But I must be prudent lest I resume my old habits of lounging and of dreaming. Now, Abbé Moulin, you appear to be an excellent man. This action of Renaudel's has touched you deeply, so I'll give you the means of rejoicing the heart of your penitent by telling him that he rendered me a great service when he left me as poor as Job."

"A service!" said the priest, astonished.

"Yes. When I was rich I was idle and unknown; when I became poor I had to work. If you can kindly wait a few minutes while I tell my story, you will be able to tell this honest swindler when you go back that he is perhaps doing me a great injury by returning this money."

"I am in haste," replied the priest, "but I feel a little inquisitive."

"You need not be uneasy. My story is soon told. Imagine a silly, conceited young man, worshipping poetry and mad about literature, falling into his fortune before he was twenty years of age, then you can guess the rest.

"I went into raptures about everything. What taste I had! I took the last novels of Chivalry quite

seriously, and had great veneration for writers of light plays. Each day I began a great work—a drama—never getting beyond the description of the scenery for the first act—'stage to represent a forest; on the left a tree,' etc. Delightful state of mind, after all! I happened to meet a friend who was two years older than I. He used to shave to resemble Baudelaire. I was quite dazzled by him. He took me round to two cafés, one in the Latin Quarter, the other on Montmartre, and I thought I saw in him the future king of Paris and of the intellectual world. I followed his guidance blindly, and paid him my respects with drinks. In return he taught me to look upon almost everything with contempt. I supplied the money to found a review; we were not to write for the general public, our readers were to consist of twenty-five persons. According to my mentor, any one who obtained the least success in literature was a Philistine—a mediocrity. But I am afraid I am speaking Chinese to you, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"No! no! I think I understand. Go on," said the Abbé, who began to think better of the young man.

"Well, as I was rich, I became the Mæcenas of the party. The chief of our school got me to publish a fortnightly periodical to defend our ideas. We called it *Instantana*. The frontispiece represented a young person, with black stockings, on horseback upon a photographic apparatus.

"Those persons conducting the paper met every evening in a bar in the Rue Cujas, where I presided as Laurent the Magnificent of Bohemia; and where I

had every month to pay a bill for the Lœvenbrau beer, sauerkraut, ham, pickled herrings, etc.

"Two classes of writers contributed to the *Instantana;* the prose writers, who, after Stendhal's fashion, examined every morning the state of their souls, with the peevishness of a dyspeptic looking at his tongue in the glass; then came the poets—the 'allegorists,' rhyming shockingly; one of them, a Chilian, wished that every word should give a physical sensation. No one's reputation was safe from the *Instantana;* even the future fame of the poets of the café opposite was jeoparded by our criticisms.

"We called Victor Hugo 'that poor Hugo' and granted that Bossuet had the gift of style. Racine we took under our special protection, no one well knew why.

"This was all very disgraceful, but I thought everything admirable. I paid for my admiration, too, both in pocket and in health. I supplied all the funds and went to bed at two o'clock in the morning, heavy with beer and æsthetics. I only published some short poems in my journal, of which I am sure my dear collaborators made fun behind my back. The *Instantana* appeared for three years, and all I gained from it was a duel—two shots without any result. A lawsuit was beginning against me when Renaudel fled to America with the remnants of my fortune, which would otherwise have been converted into useless paper and sauerkraut ham."

"And nothing was left, my child?" said the Abbé Moulin.

"No, I was ruined, cleaned out completely, and, worse than all, I had idle and expensive habits. I lived for some months by selling my books, my furniture, and my clothes. Things were coming to the worst, when I met one of my old comrades who saved me. He was writing witty articles for a high-class paper. We had called him a traitor in the *Instantana;* he obtained me a berth in the office of the journal as general reporter.

"I had to live, and when relating my stories about rabid dogs, or the old lady who met with an accident at the corner of the Rue Montmartre, I had no time to ask myself, like the Chilian with the gong-voice, whether my words were redolent of a rose or of a gas leakage, or produced the sensation of the touch of an Angora cat. I wrote my chapter of accidents in my best style, so as to get ten francs for it.

"Indeed, it is fops alone who maintain that journalism spoils the style. Oh, how hard I found the life at first! What hurry! What feverish agitation! I had to leave a charity ball to run to the Place de la Roquette to see an execution; and after a provincial tour with the president, I had to take sausages and small wine with the Anarchists. It was life in all its phases; and I entered into it thoroughly, and in time grew to love it. By degrees I acquired a certain amount of popularity, and while writing my reports under a pseudonym, contributed original tales and sketches in my real name. Let me confess it! When writing the latter I thought more of pleasing my readers than anything else. The stupid writers of the *Instantana* were

on the wrong track; one should work to please the people. Théophile Gautier was right in saying that one need not be an imbecile to succeed as a writer. There were some people, my dear Abbé, who liked to read my articles!

"About six weeks after publishing my first novel, I found that a good many people were envious of me. I was torn to pieces in the cafés when my back was turned—a very good sign. I am waiting anxiously for the day when I shall see it stated that I cheat at cards or that I belong to the police, for then I may be sure that my success is assured. Glory, you know, may end by laurels, but usually begins with baked apples. My book is not without faults. It is written to please commonplace people; but I shall do better later.

"If in five years I have exchanged idleness for industry, vanity for common-sense; if I have got at some of those luscious grapes that others, less lucky, call 'sour,' I owe it, dear Monsieur, to the loss of my fortune. You may tell that poor devil of a swindler, Renaudel, that I am indebted to him for my career!"

The old priest, by this time, felt very cordial toward the young poet, and though a little bewildered by his eloquence, would willingly have remained listening much longer had he not thought of the visits he must still pay.

"I shall relate all faithfully to Renaudel, Monsieur. But, as I have told you already, I am pressed for time. Would you kindly sign this receipt?"

M. Dublé signed; then, taking in his hand the draft, said in a low voice: "I bid you welcome, heavy bag.

But mind you, not to interfere with my work for the future. Last night I refused to attend the midnight revels of my friend Thurel, the dramatic writer, though I knew that pretty Margotte, the little blonde of the Variétés, was to be there. Money! money! I fear you will give me bad advice."

The priest, a little weary of this monologue, prepared to go. "Pardon, Monsieur," said the poet, "Christmas, through your hands, brings me this pretty present. I can not get cash for it to-night; but I have the five hundred francs from my novel. Here they are for you! You know a few poor children."

"Thank you, Monsieur," replied the Abbé Moulin. "I shall give it to my five orphans of the Rue Croulebarbe."

"Don't forget the old people, either," said the poet. "Yesterday I met the song-writer, Chulieux, sixty-eight years of age, going through the mud to a small place where he was to dine with some workmen and pay for his dinner with a song. He is out of fashion, but he has had at times a spark of genius in Pierre Dupont's style. He is very ill; I intend to send him to the south of France."

The priest smiled, deeply touched.

Louis Dublé added, gayly, "You see, we men of letters have also our old ragpickers;" then smilingly accompanied the worthy priest to the door.

CHAPTER III

THE SCHOOL FOR DEMOISELLES

THE Abbé Moulin then went to the Rue du Cardinal Lemoine, thinking that, after all, money can not give talent or fame, though it may prevent you from achieving it. And who knows but that, in restoring his fortune to the poet, Renaudel may not have deprived French literature of a masterpiece? Yet, what about the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal"? There are so few persons willing to make reparation for the wrong they have done that it would not do to discourage them.

As the horse was fresh the priest was not very long in reaching his destination. It was seven o'clock when he arrived.

As the fog had lifted a little, he was able to read the words, "School for Demoiselles, kept by Mademoiselle Latournure," written in yellow letters upon a black board over the gate.

He got out, rang the bell, and was reverently received by a maidservant. "Mademoiselle is about to dine," she said, "but it does not matter. Come in, Monsieur."

The priest crossed a little garden and the servant

opened a door, whence he heard the joyful voices of children.

He beheld a pleasant sight: a humble classroom, with yellow-painted walls, ornamented by tables of weights and measures and maps of France, Europe, etc.; in a corner were some desks, and in the centre of the room a middle-aged lady and ten little girls were seated round a table covered with glasses and plates and lighted by two large petroleum lamps.

In the time of General Cavaignac, the old lady must have been a sprightly brunette. She still preserved her black eyes, full of vivacity, and her rosy complexion, but her hair was like white spun silk; her sweet, agreeable smile revealed a fund of good humor and good health.

As the priest came in, the elderly lady was in the act of carving a roast turkey, which sent out an appetizing odor of chestnut-sauce and sausage-meat. It was a treat to hear the joyous cries of the children. One could plainly see that it was not every day they got roast turkey with chestnuts. They looked like little ogresses smelling fresh meat. They were not, however, workingmen's daughters. No; they belonged to those struggling people who try to hide their poverty and be genteel. They sent their children to Mademoiselle Latournure, and paid her because she had a high-class diploma. And each mother, though only the wife of a modest employé or small shopkeeper, had decorated her little girl with a knot of ribbon and freshly ironed frills, so that she might look nice at "Mademoiselle's" dinner.

This turkey with chestnuts was a rare treat indeed! Very different from the plain, scanty meals of everyday life. Yet it was not, alas! a very large one; it did not cost more than seven or eight francs in the market, and looked quite small compared with those garnished with truffles exhibited in Chevet's window. The Abbé Moulin had surely seen much larger ones at the pious woman's dinners, but I doubt if he ever had witnessed such wonderful appetites!

He was greatly surprised at the joyful appearance of the elderly lady, for Renaudel had spoken of her as a melancholy person, in bad health.

"Mademoiselle Latournure?" doubtfully asked the old priest.

"Yes, Monsieur," the lady replied, gracefully.

"I am sorry to interrupt your dinner, Mademoiselle, but I bring you some important and very agreeable news. May I have a word with you in private?"

"With pleasure," she said, rather nervously. "Clémence"—to the servant—"show the Abbé Moulin into the parlor. I will follow you immediately, Monsieur."

Laying down her knife, Mademoiselle Latournure looked round at the children, saying, "You must wait for me a little, dear children, and I hope you will be good."

"Oh, yes, Mademoiselle!" came the chorus of the children. It was like a chorus of an old tragedy, one of lamentations. This beautiful turkey, smoking hot, to be left to turn cold! Ah! the naughty priest!

The priest regretted this quite as much as the children, as he followed the maid into the parlor, a very

small room, with a writing-table, six chairs, and an old print representing the heads of some French kings.

The old priest was a poor diplomatist—priests are not allowed to go to theatres, and he had not seen the play, *Joy Frightens*. He spoke too quickly of Renaudel, and showed too abruptly the paper, with the dazzling figures. "Three hundred and sixty-five thousand, four hundred and forty-three francs."

A great change came over the face of the schoolmistress. She seemed as if she would have a stroke of apoplexy, but luckily she burst into tears, and incoherent words followed. She thanked the priest heartily, calling upon the Virgin and all the saints to pour all the blessings of heaven upon that scamp—no! upon that good Renaudel. She announced her intention of sending Clémence at once to the pawnbroker's to release the silver ladle, the six silver covers, the sugar-tongs, the coffee-spoons, and the fish-slice, which were well-nigh forfeited.

A shrill cry, followed by tears, from the next apartment, suddenly interrupted the interview.

"Oh!" said Mademoiselle Latournure, as she hastily got up, "it is Ernestine crying for the turkey—she is not yet five—I must not forget the poor children. Will you come, reverend sir? We can converse just as freely before the children."

You may be sure she was warmly welcomed by the children. Ernestine left off crying at once.

"Hand a chair to the Abbé Moulin, Clémence," she said. "Perhaps you would kindly share our dinner

with us, Monsieur? We should look upon it as a great honor."

The priest would gladly have accepted the invitation, as he was hungry, but he remembered that he had still two visits before him; so he took only a little wine and a biscuit.

The fowl was divided in tiny pieces, so that everybody had some; the children began to eat heartily; the greedy Ernestine had the rump for her share.

"You see, Monsieur," said the schoolmistress, enchanted, "I am not rich, or rather five minutes ago I was not rich. My school hardly procures me a living, but every year on Christmas Eve I eat a turkey with chestnuts with some of my pupils whose parents can't afford the midnight luxury; it is my only 'extra' in the year. Is it not a pleasant sight, dear Monsieur?"

She spoke sternly to one of the children:

"Marie Duval, eat more decently; you, a big girl, nine years old, are you not ashamed to lick your fingers? Clémence, you need henceforth have no more words with the coal-dealer and the milk-woman; they will be paid on delivery. Yes, I am possessed again of my property, but I shall retain my school, if only for the children's dinner. I shall, however, have this treat at all the festivals of the Church, and the fowl will be an enormous one—you hear, children!"

Three of the largest girls answered, "Yes, Mademoiselle."

The promises of the teacher passed almost unheeded, for future events offer but little interest to children, and the girls' attention was absorbed by the turkey.

"Mademoiselle," said M. Moulin, "kindly excuse me for expressing my astonishment. I find you in good health and very cheerful, enjoying a pure pleasure which is also an act of kindness, and I shall confess it to you, Renaudel has spoken to me of you——"

"As an egotistical person," exclaimed Mademoiselle Latournure, with a charming laugh, which made her look years younger. "Well, Renaudel told you the truth."

"How is this?" said the priest.

"Yes, a very stupid old maid, always complaining. I was so when Renaudel knew me. Tell this good robber that in ruining my fortune he has restored me to health and cheerfulness."

At this moment Clémence brought in a large apple-tart, which was hailed with hurrahs.

"Emilie Charron," said the schoolmistress, "sit upright unless you wish to become hunchbacked—and you, Sophie, don't let me see your elbows on the table again."

Her scolding was not very serious, for contentment was visible in her little black eyes, upon her rosy cheeks.

"Dear Monsieur," she said, on cutting the tart, "take your wine and biscuit, and I will tell you briefly my history. I did not marry, as I had to take care of my old father, who was a widower and ailing; on the day of his death, an illustrious doctor came and said, 'He is dead,' and charged five hundred francs for his visit.

"I was forty-five, alone in the world, and wanting a

deal of rest, as my poor old father, who suffered much, had become very exacting. It is now my turn to take care of myself, I thought. I fancied I was ill and I became so really through drugging myself.

"The *menu* of each meal was a state affair, each digestion a drama. I adopted a milk diet for three months—I have even been a vegetarian. I was persuaded that certain vegetables were dangerous and that spinach contained a slow poison.

"Yes, I exhausted the patience of ten doctors and changed my medicinal waters every year. I consulted homœopathic doctors, somnambulists, all the quacks, and I have been seen in distant suburbs entering the back shops of herbalists (half sorcerers) who sell draughts.

"My mild temper became soured, I exacted pity from everybody, and whoever did not take an interest in my health became odious to me. At last Renaudel took away my fortune, except a few thousand francs. I was then obliged to work or to die from hunger.

"This little day-school was for sale; I bought it, and very soon, among my little pupils, the flame of maternity smouldering in the heart of old maids was lighted. I had been ailing and egotistical because I had nothing to do, no one to love.

"Formerly, I used peptone to digest my raw meat; but now my stomach puts up with beef and onions, and potatoes and bacon—earning one's livelihood is an excellent hygienic system!

"Besides, I have seen so much poverty nobly borne in the families of my pupils that I have learned resigna-

tion. I have seen dark days. I receive hardly any money and have few pupils; but the cheerfulness of children is so contagious that I have learned to live for daily bread. Only yesterday I sent my old Cashmere shawl to the pawn-shop in order to buy this Christmas turkey. You restore to me my fortune; I am pleased at that, but it shall no longer go to enrich chemists. I shall not give up my school. As I am growing old, I shall take in an assistant, some poor girl with a diploma, and I shall be her friend. In the sideboard I shall keep good things for the little girls whose baskets may be scantily supplied. I shall no longer torment the poor mothers with the faded gowns, who sigh so bitterly when paying me the monthly twenty francs for the schooling of their children. I wish to remain among these genuine joys and the pure eyes of the children. Tell all this to Renaudel. I owe it to him that I am no longer an old mad-woman draining chemists' bottles."

The apple-tart had vanished; the children were chattering so much, it was like the warbling of birds in a tree on the rising of an April sun. Ernestine, the greedy child, now satiated, was sleeping soundly. Truly, the old priest felt pleased that poverty had restored joy of body and of soul to the amiable schoolmistress; it seemed to him a paradise. He called to mind his ragpickers who, through lack of money, were in bad health and died so soon.

"I congratulate you, Mademoiselle," said he, "on your recovery; money does not always give health, it may even injure it. I have among my poor a child

thirteen years old dying slowly from anæmia; she wants nourishing food and wine, but they are too dear."

"I understand you, dear Monsieur," was the reply of the schoolmistress. "Kindly send me the name and address of the little girl. She will have soon some Médoc and *filets de bœuf*. Now I have to put their warm clothing on the children and to take them to their homes, so I must take my leave of you."

M. Moulin thanked the schoolmistress heartily. He found his coachman walking to and fro, as it was so cold. The moon was shining, the fog had nearly lifted.

"Now, then," soliloquized the priest in the cab, "shall I meet at last an unhappy person who will be pleased with money!"

CHAPTER IV

ALL IS WELL WITH MOTHER AND CHILD

QUARTER of an hour later, the Abbé Moulin alighted before a new house in the Rue de Rennes; he asked whether Monsieur Burtal was at home.

The *concierge*, in a dressing-gown, was warming himself and reading his evening journal. He was angered at being disturbed, and especially at the sight of the cassock; he shouted, "Third story, to the left," and resumed his favorite reading. The old priest read the name "Henri Burtal, Architect." He saw above the door a fragment of the frieze of the Parthenon, whereon were some of the celebrated small horses. This plaster model meant that Monsieur Burtal would build with pleasure a temple of Minerva or of Jupiter Olympia if you desired it; he was also quite ready to take something off the heavy joiner's bill, according to the regulations of the Hôtel de Ville.

At the ringing of the bell a garrulous old woman opened the door, drew back at sight of the priest, and shouted, her breath smelling strongly of cassia: "Heavens! it is not yet the midwife!"

"I fear I arrive at an awkward moment," said the

priest, "but I shall detain Monsieur Burtal a few minutes only."

"You may go into the study of Monsieur Burtal; he is with Madame, who felt ill at twelve o'clock; I'll send him to you, as men are so stupid at such times."

The priest entered and saw, on a high table, a large drawing.

"Ah! the fire is going out," said the old woman. "I must tell you, Monsieur, I am the nurse who is to take care of Madame to-night; I require some stimulants as I have to be up, and would you believe it, that servant, who looks like a snipe, is nearly mad and has prepared no dinner. I ate cold veal—it is so heavy; luckily I found a little cognac in the sideboard; I never liked brandy, it hurts me, I only take a drop mixed with something sweet." The Megæra left the room.

Monsieur Moulin looked at the drawing representing a small railway station for distant villages, where corn, poppies, and dandelions grow between the rails of a single line, so little is it travelled upon. Nothing was wanting, neither the goods-shed nor the lamp-room nor other buildings.

The priest noticed also some framed drawings and water-colors on the walls, representing other small stations. He thought it must be very monotonous to be always at the same kind of work, always building the same houses, where the same key might have opened the station-masters' locks all along the line.

The Abbé Moulin, who had been made uneasy by the horses of Phidias, became composed again. Monsieur Burtal evidently had not yet tried building cathe-

drals, royal palaces, or opera-houses. He noticed, however, a water-color drawing in a corner—an ideal restoration of the Baths of Caracalla which showed that Monsieur Burtal had visited Italy and dreamed of glory.

But there was no hope that this madman, son of Septimus Severus, assassinated, as were many of the Roman emperors, in the year 217 of the Christian era, would ever come to life or cause his gigantic baths to be repaired. The architect must be a poor man, and the priest, who was bringing him a fortune, was much pleased with that supposition. He heard in the antechamber a sudden exclamation from the old drunkard and a loud sound in another woman's voice; then a door opened, from which escaped stifled cries.

Soon after, Monsieur Burtal, in a gray suit, presented himself before the priest.

Oh, what a handsome young man! A Hercules, with a head of flaxen hair and a graceful figure. He was thirty; his head was small like those of ancient statues; his blue eyes shone with the light of genial frankness; and although the mouth was rather large, what white teeth! what an agreeable smile! Such a man at an evening party would turn the head of many a young girl.

And this fine young man of the build of Theseus was a tracer of small plans in India-ink! At the present moment he was evidently in the greatest anxiety.

"Pardon me, Monsieur, for having made you wait. Some one has told you of my poor Cécile. It is her first confinement, though we have been married four

years. I love her so much; it is hard to see her suffering when I can not render any assistance. Kindly sit down. I am ready to listen to you, Monsieur."

The good old priest had in no wise the appearance of a vicar-general who comes to ask for the estimate of a cathedral, yet the architect was hoping that he might have come about the restoration of a church, hospital, convent, or a college. He composed his feelings to receive this possible customer cordially.

"You will pardon me," replied Monsieur Moulin, opening his portfolio, "for having disturbed you at such a time when you know the mission I am intrusted with. Prepare yourself for a pleasant surprise. Your former banker, Renaudel——"

"The scoundrel!"

"He returns all that he has taken from you and the others. I have to give you this draft for five hundred and sixty-seven thousand, eight hundred and ninety-nine francs."

"Upon my word, this is a deal better than an order!"

And if the emperor of China with all his mandarins had come to request Monsieur Burtal to construct an Indian temple forty stories high, after the style of the Eiffel Tower, the radiant face of the artist would not have expressed more surprise and joy. He examined the precious papers carefully and said:

"What a great happiness! I must go and announce this good news to Cécile."

"Don't think of such a thing," said the priest, "you might kill her."

"You are right," whispered the architect; "I thank

you! This happiness does frighten even me," added he, with a changed voice, "when my wife is suffering so much! In a few minutes I may be informed that we have a child, that all danger is over—and besides, we should be rich—but all this is too good to be true. Ah! dear Monsieur, we lead a very sad life; I was obliged to accept the humble parts of the work in my profession! I feel only too happy when I have any work to do. I am obliged to be separated from my beloved wife very often in order to superintend my work. My good Cécile could not order a new gown this winter, but upon my honor, were I told now, 'If you wish to be certain that your wife will recover, cast this draft in the fire,' I would do it directly. This money startles me."

At this moment a protracted cry of anguish was heard. "My Cécile!" exclaimed the architect, and he rushed out of the room.

Monsieur Moulin feared the result of his indiscretion, but he wanted his receipt for Renaudel. He remained alone before the small railway-stations. In a few minutes Monsieur Burtal came back.

"She is more calm," said he. "We had not two hundred francs in the house this morning. Accept my excuses, dear Monsieur; you mentioned a receipt!"

"Here it is," said the priest.

Monsieur Burtal signed, then, as if dreaming: "More than half a million," whispered he; "abundance of riches, as formerly—but I was not happy at that time; truly I have known happiness only since my ruin!"

This one also! thought the priest. It was truly sur-

prising! "What do you say, Monsieur?" said he, aloud. "Just now you told me you have had hard times."

"I was wrong," interrupted Monsieur Burtal. "For the last four years my life has been delightful, for I love and I am loved. That is the reason why I can put up with cloudy days; and had it not been for poverty, I should not have known that Cécile loved me so tenderly. Tell me the truth, Monsieur, what did Renaudel tell you of me?"

"He spoke of you as a young man," replied the priest, "who was addicted to pleasure."

"As a rake—we can speak frankly," replied Monsieur Burtal. "I will tell you the history of my life, so that I may perhaps forget my frightful anxiety. At the age of twenty-three I was rich, good-hearted, but I had very excitable blood. I travelled in Italy, was supposed to be gaining knowledge, and on my return I could, perhaps, build arenas comfortable enough in which to give up Christians to ferocious beasts, but in case I might have had to build a house five stories high, it was possible for me to forget the well of the staircase and the kitchen-sink. In fact, I had occupied myself much less with the Colosseum and Saint Peter's of Rome than with the pretty flower-girls who stroll in the evening before the cafés and offer you small bouquets. On my return to Paris I resumed this kind of study—but I do not offend you, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

"Keep on," was the reply of the priest, "I have heard worse things in the confessional box."

"In the house where I lived in the Rue de Vaugi-

rard, I had had Cécile and her mother as neighbors. I lived on the second floor, but they occupied the garret. They were poor; the mother was the widow of a government-office clerk and enjoyed a small pension; the daughter, a telegraphy pupil, went every morning to learn the Morse alphabet in the Rue de Grenelle. I found her quite charming; it seemed to me, after some exchanges of glances, that I did not displease her; then began my saluting her on the staircase and a little conversation; very shortly I was received in their home; but my advances were those of of a would-be seducer. She repelled me without anger, and a great sadness was depicted in her voice, on her face. Marry her? I could do so; I even thought of it a little, but I was feather-brained then. Soon after she had frowned upon me, a literary friend of mine whose comedy was played at the Gymnase presented me to one of the principal actresses, who took me away in her brougham, with the boxful of jewels and the bouquets of the third act. You will understand easily, Monsieur, that it was I who, for a whole year afterward, replenished the casket with diamonds, filled the actress's box with flowers, and settled the livery-stable accounts.

"Through that wild extravagance a good part of my patrimony, entrusted entirely to Renaudel, had already vanished when that swindler took away the rest. The actress, a pupil of the Conservatoire who knew the verses of Corneille, said to me then: 'Let us be friends.' She appeared the next day in the mail-coach of a gentleman of princely blood who had devoted his talents

to the special art of coaching, and occupied every evening at the theatre an armchair beside mine. Ruined and heartbroken, I began to seek employment. I had left my apartments of the Rue de Vaugirard, and had nearly forgotten my gentle neighbors. How could I ever have supposed that this young girl, so stupidly offended by me, was taking an interest in my fate and had been saddened by my misfortune? It was so, however. On a spring evening I was returning home sorrow-stricken after a day of fruitless search, when suddenly I met Cécile in mourning in the Tuileries garden. She shook hands with me, told me her mother had died six months before, that she was alone in the world. She had heard of my trouble; she then tried to comfort me. Ah! dear Abbé Moulin, I know not what I told her, nor what the mammas and the nurses, seated under the chestnut trees, must have thought of us; but I remember that I kept her hands in mine a long while, and I begged her pardon with tears."

"Well done!" exclaimed the Abbé Moulin, overjoyed.

"But, mind, I am about to offend you a little—I offered my arm to Cécile; she accepted it, and even consented to dine with me in a small restaurant. By Jove! I was at the end of my resources; there, for a franc and a half you were entitled to have two detestable dishes and a paltry dessert. But I felt pleased that this dear girl should have remained my friend, and I truly believe I had never eaten anything better than the leather-like meat with mushrooms which was

served us. After dinner we strolled along the quays, and by the way in which the arm of Cécile was leaning on mine, by her looks of pity on me, I felt—oh! it was so sweet—that she loved me! I felt that if I repeated to her now the words of love of former times they would no more be regarded as an insult, but an exquisite pleasure, and that if I were willing, the generous girl, who had repelled me when I was happy and rich, would give herself up entirely to me, now that I had become poor!"

"I truly hope——" said the priest, frightened.

"Be assured, dear Monsieur. On the pavement opposite the Hôtel des Monnaies—at that hour it is a lonely place—I shall confess to you that I gave a kiss to my Cécile; but it was in swearing to her that I was giving her my heart, that she must become my wife, and that we would live as best we could, that we would go hand in hand in all sorts of weather. We were quick about this affair; after a few days we went to the Town Hall and to the parish church. I sold a few Japanese articles for which I had paid very dear, but which are very cheap at the Bon Marché, and bought the bride's white gown and bouquet. By good fortune, I obtained my present situation as an architect on the railway on the eve of my marriage; it is a modest one, for, as you see, I have not to build Parthénons. We manage to live, however, and we are happy; the most humble existence is tolerable if some flowers of sentiment are springing; it is like nasturtiums upon salad, which, when so adorned, seems better. But all that is passed—I am now possessed of five hundred

thousand francs, and the problem of shoes and stays for my beloved is now solved. I have seen a pretty cluster of emeralds at the Palais Royal, and from tomorrow—— But my Cécile is in danger of death now. Oh! reverend father, give me some hope; pray God for my dear wife, and tell me that all of them come into the world without accident—those children born on Christmas night."

The old priest, moved to tears, pressed the hands of the architect, seeking words of comfort, when the nurse, as red as a peony by emotion, and by the cognac she had drunk, entered the room, shouting: "It is a boy! Bravo, Monsieur—both doing well!"

Monsieur Burtal, forgetting his visitor, ran to kiss his dear wife. The priest exclaimed:

"What a good young man this Burtal is! He is right—true love is something which is not to be bought! May the good Lord bless them and their newly born child!"

Noticing that it was a quarter to ten, the priest exclaimed: "Oh! I must start. It is a long way from here to the Boulevard Malesherbes."

He was about to leave at once, when Monsieur Burtal reëntered, full of joy. "No, no!" he cried. "You shall not go away like this—superb! the little one! and if you could see my Cécile, so pale—but what a smile! No, I am too happy. I must do good to some one; you know, dear Monsieur, of a good deal of poverty—tell me of some one to relieve."

"Well, my dear Monsieur," answered the Abbé Moulin, always having in mind the poor Mouffetard

district, "if poverty has given you love and happiness, I know two good young people for whom it does the reverse—the sweetheart is working in imitation pearls and the man is cutting peat. The girl is pure, and that is so rare in the Parish Saint-Médard; they only want five hundred francs to make a home."

"They shall have one thousand," replied the architect. "Come when you like, dear Monsieur, for the money. I rely on you for the baptism of my son, whom we shall name Noël."

CHAPTER V

IN THE GAY WORLD

ON arriving at the residence of the Marquis de Capdecamp, Boulevard Malesherbes, near the Park Monceau, the Abbé Moulin's carriage was ordered to keep the line, as a great number of broughams and landaus were at the door; the Marquis was giving a reception.

The entrance was ablaze, there was a profusion of plants and lights, and a beautiful Eastern carpet covered the stone steps leading up to the door. A lackey was throwing open the doors of the different carriages —a handsome flunkey in sumptuous livery and powdered hair, whose calves, molded in white silk, would have sufficed at the court of Catherine II to transform a simple grenadier into a commander-in-chief or a cabinet minister.

At sight of the priest, with his old hat, faded topcoat, and greasy neckband, the overdressed lackey could not suppress a start of astonishment and drew back in disgust; but the old priest had, by this time, armed himself with assurance—he would not allow himself to be stranded in the harbor.

"I have an important communication to make to the Marquis," said he to the lackey.

"I don't know that the Marquis will be able to receive you," replied the servant. "Ask the *valet-de-chambre;* there he is!"

Without being intimidated by the five or six tall men in livery and powdered hair, the old priest made his way toward the *valet-de-chambre*—an important personage in black silk stockings, lace ruffles, and cuffs—and again asked whether he could see the Marquis.

At first the valet was sure that it would be impossible to see the Marquis. What! Disturb him, and three hundred people in the reception-rooms!

The Abbé Moulin, however, was persistent, and at last, thanks to his cassock, Monsieur Auguste consented to go and ask his master whether he could see him. Left to himself, the priest felt rather out of place in the gorgeous ante-chamber, and hid himself as best he could between two large azaleas in bloom.

He watched the fine ladies divesting themselves of their chinchilla and blue-fox furs in the cloak-room opposite, and for the first time in his life he was able to contemplate a series of beautiful necks, arms, and breasts. This would have been nothing strange to you, dear reader, who are an *habitué* of society or hold a season ticket for opera performances. The good priest was as strong-minded as Saint Anthony himself and only noticed the jewels and ornaments that heightened the beauty of these "treasures," as our grandfathers called them. This New Testament socialist, who had ruined himself to give to the poor, felt a feeling of discontent at the sight of such riches.

"Decidedly," he thought, biting his lips, "they have

too many diamonds, and my poor old ragpickers of the Butte aux Cailles are obliged to take their mattresses and blankets to the pawn-shop! All this is badly arranged."

Monsieur Auguste's return snatched him away from his reflections.

"Will the reverend gentleman follow me?"

He ascended a narrow staircase, and reached a large apartment on the first story. A Dutch chandelier gave a discreet light, which showed some bookshelves; enormous logs of oak were burning in a splendid fireplace.

"The Marquis requests you to wait for him a few minutes," said the valet on leaving.

The priest examined the armorial bearings of the Marquis on the top of the chimney without being much impressed; he was, in fact, ignorant of the noble science of heraldry, and could not understand the beauties of an escutcheon where there were castles similar to those of the game of chess, a red cross like that upon the bottles of Swiss absinthe, and some shells like those at the door of a wine-merchant in the oyster season; he saw also a lion which looked like a circus poodle. He even thought the proud motto of the Capdecamp family, "Always at the head!" lacking in Christian modesty. And on his calling to mind the share of this family in the well-known defeats of our history, the famous motto, "Always at the head," so much admired by the d'Hozier of the time and lovers of heraldry, appeared to the worthy priest grotesque boasting.

After entering the room he heard a vague noise close to him, behind a thick velvet portière.

Yes! behind this veil was that world mentioned so often by him in his sermons; that world unknown to him, but whose vain pomps, seductions, and dangers were to be feared, said he, by the children he had in his catechising classes.

After all, that mysterious world, against which he had thundered so often in quoting the Fathers of the Church, was there close to him. The Abbé Moulin had only to open slightly these two pieces of heavy velvet drapery and he could see that famous world in the midst of the pleasures which lead to its perdition. He yielded to curiosity and gazed on this extraordinary sight.

He saw a salon resplendent with light. Two hundred women were seated upon slight gilt chairs, as closely packed as sardines.

Under the canopy of the doors, right and left, was a great number of men with large shirt-fronts and dull, tired faces, all standing.

Yonder was seen the bust of the wife of the Marshal de Capdecamp, in the reign of Louis XV, whose husband, the illustrious marshal, had been beaten by Frederick the Great; near it was a man, very ugly, with the shaven face of a strolling player and thick lips, uttering obscure prose mingled with stale puns and stupid talk about deceived husbands and mothers-in-law; he had a deal of assurance and the manners of one under the influence of drink.

The Abbé Moulin, though simple, was not stupid.

This compact crowd, this nauseous odor of perfume, of dying flowers, and, above all, the low grimaces of the mountebank, inspired him with great horror.

How astonished the good priest would have been had he been told that these persons were so disgusted with one another that they preferred even this stupid monologue to their own conversation. This low actor was not satisfied with the forty thousand francs he earned at his theatre; he asked twenty-five louis for the evening and exacted no end of compliments. At that moment the priest reflected how shamefully the rich were wasting money, and he felt indignant, thinking of the misery of his poor.

A door opened, and the Marquis de Capdecamp entered. How superb he was! He was about fifty years of age, his beard was slightly gray, and he looked rather puffy under the eyes; but his appearance was distinguished. He had a nose like Francis I. Go and see the Titian of the Louvre! I spoke of large shirt-fronts: here was a man covered with starch; it was simply a field of snow behind his waistcoat—a Siberia crossed by the black string of an eyeglass! Certain snobs had their linen washed in London; that is now out of fashion. The Marquis sent his own linen to New York, where he found the Chinese laundrymen the best in the world.

Poor fops! you bow before your laundress, even pay your addresses to her—some of them are truly charming—but you can can never obtain this dazzling brightness; before the shirt-front of the Marquis one had to keep one's eyes down for fear of ophthalmia.

After a very stiff salutation the Marquis, in a haughty tone of voice, asked the priest the object of his visit.

Frankly, the bearing of the Marquis displeased the priest; then he had been obliged to wait long, and so without ceremony he related promptly the purport of his errand.

"Renaudel—your ex-banker—everybody has been paid—here is the draft—one million—etc.,—and my receipt, if you please, Marquis."

The Marquis turned red to his ears, but he wished to appear unmoved and to oppose the impassibility of a nobleman to the plebeian roughness of the priest. He examined the draft attentively; it was certainly genuine; then he slipped it in his pocket, signed the receipt, and gave it back with the tips of his fingers.

The priest was about to retire, when suddenly, broken by emotion, the Marquis dropped into an arm-chair, and stammered out in a voice broken by sobs: "Too late! Too late!"

"Good heavens, Marquis! what is the matter with you?" exclaimed the priest, amazed.

The Marquis got up, his face purple with anger, and strode up and down the apartment. "Ah! truly," said he, with fury, "he restores what he has stolen, this robber! he compensates his victims, this forger! with the interest—I see it, for the sum he stole from me was much below this figure! You expect, no doubt, you, his messenger, that I shall ask you to present Renaudel my compliments for this fine action. On the contrary, I bid you tell this man that one can not be rehabilitated so easily; that, as regards my

case, he has repaired nothing of the harm he has done me; that I have nothing but utter contempt for him!" He foamed at the mouth and strode past the priest, who recoiled. "One million!" he shouted, staring in the face of the priest. "I laugh at his million—I am worth twelve millions! They are the millions of Mademoiselle Murdock, that is to say, Madame la Marquise de Capdecamp, who gives this evening a splendid party, and whose toilette will be described tomorrow in twenty papers. And my wife's money—do you hear?—it is like the money of Renaudel, it is money stolen! One million! What does he wish me to do with his million? Can I redeem my honor with it?"

Ah! the man of the world had vanished; he cared no longer for his snowy shirt-front; he was beating his breast with his trembling hand.

"My frankness astonishes you, is it not so? So much the worse! I must burst! My heart has been oppressed too long. No, but do you see, this Renaudel, a low scamp, believes himself quits with me by restoring my money. Good heavens! till the day when he stripped me I had not lived a dull life; I was abandoned to debauchery—as you call it! Among us it is named gallantry and generosity! These are the peccadilloes of a gentleman; and you priests, you absolve us once a year. I had had my hand open, as a gentleman should, that's all. I had tasted enough of the life of pleasure, I thought of finishing decently. A few hundred thousand francs remained to me; I thought of retiring to a small estate of mine in the

Mayenne. I had promised myself this pleasure. Suddenly this Renaudel took flight, and I became the prey of twenty creditors. What was I to do? I was forty-seven years of age, I could not enlist—to work I was ashamed!

"I debated whether I had not still something to sell—a pledge to carry among the Jews—and then I found this last prey of the usurer." Then, pointing at the armorial bearings of his family: "These only remained to me, and I have had the millions of the Jewess in exchange for my coronet of a marquis, the motto, the lions, the castles, the shells, the whole shop! And I am the son-in-law of this Murdock who sold countermarks in his youth, who kept a gambling-house; of this Murdock, who with his so-called 'office of agriculture,' emptied the old stockings of the workingmen and the peasants; he robbed the poor, this Murdock, and if justice were not a farce he should have been sent to Nouméa with Renaudel. Tell that gentleman with tardy scruples of conscience, tell him that this is his work—let him not shrug his shoulders and exclaim: 'That poor Marquis, he will become accustomed to his new life.' Look! I have been married four years, and I have always before me the shame of this *mésalliance!* Many others have acted as I did, and sleep tranquilly on the same pillow with the daughter of a robber—there are such people here in this assembly. Behind this curtain, mingled with the acquaintances of my wife, is a throng of *parvenus* and vulgarians—others who have not sold their name and are without reproach have come all the same from the

recesses of their noble suburbs—attracted by gold, bowing before fortune; they also have the right to despise me. What does the opinion of this crowd upon my conduct matter to me? I value only the opinion of people of honor, alas! and what that opinion is I know." The Marquis had sat down again; the good priest looked at him with astonishment.

"One million," pursued the gentleman ironically; "one can satisfy a beautiful whim with one million. I know in Yonne a historical castle which is about to be sold—quite in grand style—Mansard and Le Nôtre—the Marquise would like to possess it, the biddings will not go beyond eight hundred thousand francs—it would be gallant on my part to offer to the Marquise this royal gift. But she is rich enough. I have only this million. I must think of myself; only one thing, alas! would please me, but that is not to be bought.

"Listen, my dear sir. I served during the war of 1870 among the Zouaves of Charrette with one of my cousins—the Baron Louis de Capdecamp, who is my senior by fifteen years; he belongs to a poor branch of our family. I have known few men so brave.

"At Patay, when we rushed in the famous charge, he looked at me and shouted to me with his laughing Kléber style: 'Capdecamp, always at the head!' The next minute he fell, with his right arm crushed. It was amputated; he received the military medal, and he does not wear the ribbon from humility, for he is very pious. He is sixty-five years of age. He has an income of three thousand francs for life; he is too

proud to accept any assistance from his relatives. He lives in one room on the fifth floor, Rue Jacob, and although one-armed, cooks his meals himself, in order to give some money to deserving poverty which he tries to find out. He is always decently dressed; when he goes to mass at Saint-Germain des Prés, you would exclaim at the sight of his lion-like eyes and his white moustache: 'Behold, honor passes!' Three months after my marriage, concerning which I had not heard one word from him, I met Louis on the Place de la Concorde; I extended my hand to him; he recoiled one step, cast on me a terrible look, put his hand in his pocket and passed on, turning away his head. Well, my dear Monsieur," said the Marquis, in a broken voice, ' the only thing that would be agreeable to me, which all the millions can not give back to me, is a clasp of the hand from my cousin Louis."

The grand airs of the Marquis had vanished; he was now an unhappy man shedding tears; the priest was deeply moved.

After a few minutes the Marquis got up, wiped his tears, and said: "I have just now offered you a sad sight. Kindly excuse me, Monsieur; there is no need to ask you to be discreet; discretion is the virtue of priests.

"I was wrong to speak so severely of Renaudel; my having married Mademoiselle Murdock is not his fault. He is very lucky, because he can purify his conscience with money. Tell him that I wish him good luck! Auguste will show you the way out."

The Marquis rang the bell nervously.

In bringing this million the good priest had thought of receiving some substantial alms for his poor; he asked for none, and, besides, that money might have brought misfortune upon them. Near the high chimney, under his bartered coat-of-arms, the Marquis remained motionless—his eyes cast down, ashamed of his despair, of his broken pride. The priest saluted him in silence and left the house.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

QUARTER past eleven already—quick, Rue de Clichy!" cried the priest to the coachman. The mist had entirely gone now—the moon was shining, in a luminous sky suiting the joyful Christmas chimes.

The Abbé Moulin, exhausted and hungry, and much disturbed also by what he had heard, entered his room, and thought at first that the fog had gathered there; but this fog smelled of Havana tobacco. He at last perceived Renaudel seated in an armchair, smoking quietly his eighth cigar.

"Here are your receipts," said the priest.

"Well done, my dear Abbé," replied the ex-banker, rising; "please do not tell me what you have heard. You will find under your breviary the promised banknote of one thousand francs! We are quits, however, and although I am not rich now, I leave you five louis extra. I will tell you the reason why. I can not take to my son the box of leaden soldiers with red trousers for which he asked me; I don't wish him to call to his mind the scenes of his childhood. I thought, as a means of comfort to me, of requesting you to go and

buy one hundred francs' worth of toys for the sons of your ragpickers in the name of the American Noël, but the express does not wait. A last hand-shake, my dear Abbé, and my best thanks."

The strange man hurriedly departed.

The Abbé Moulin dreamed a few minutes; he was no pessimist—he was certain now that glory, health, love, honor were not to be bought with money, and he intended to thank God for this when saying his midnight mass.

THE CURE FOR DISCONTENT

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CHAPTER I

TOIL AND HEALTH

UY the official list of the winning numbers of the International Lottery! Special edition with the big prize of five hundred thousand francs! Ten centimes."

At the corner of the Faubourg Montmartre you could not see the two boys in the twilight mist among the crowd; but their voices, one a tenor, the other a bass, were heard above the noise of pedestrians and vehicles.

Albéric Mesnard had just left Cahun and Son (manufacturers of collars, cuffs, and separate shirt-fronts, Rue du Sentier, in Paris, with branches in London and Hamburg). He felt keenly the damp cold of this winter evening, and, with the collar of his thin topcoat turned up, was making his way through the crowd with true Parisian skill, when he heard the two boys shouting:

"Buy the official list of the winning numbers of the International Lottery! Special edition with the big prize of five hundred thousand francs! Ten centimes!"

"Ah!" thought the young man, "they have decided upon the drawing of the big prize at last; people have been waiting for the last three years. I have a ticket."

He intended to buy the paper, but he had only a two-franc piece. It was the 30th of November, and on the next morning he would receive his monthly salary of one hundred and fifty francs as an employé in the correspondence department of M. Cahun's house. Two francs! he wanted them for his humble dinner; so he did not change his money. "To-morrow the papers will give the list of the winning numbers, and I shall have plenty of time to be sure that the half million will not fall to my share. I don't even remember where my ticket is."

Just then a pastry-cook's boy, who pushed past him roughly with his basket, very nearly poured all the cream of a piece of pastry and the sauce off a shrimp plate upon his head, and wound up by vituperating him. Albéric calmly walked along the slippery pavement. There is no more complete solitude than in a crowd; thought is at work and memory wakes up. Albéric was going up Montmartre, hurrying on through the intense fog and recalling his sorrowful youth.

Decidedly his mother had acted imprudently in obtaining this scholarship in a college for him, and in having him crammed with Latin and impractical studies.

She knew, however, the misery of the artist's life or that of the professions. When she married Mesnard, the painter of so many dozens of oysters, they could

hardly get a living, although Mesnard was a Raphael in painting oysters. His Marennes oysters, so juicy—he received third medal for them—sold easily.

During the months with the letter "r" they ate a dozen Marennes at breakfast; they were not fresh, as they had been opened early in the morning. But in the summer business was bad. No more oysters! Mesnard had then tried to paint crawfish, but failed. Artists and picture-dealers, declared unanimously, "He is excellent in oyster-painting, but inferior in painting crustaceans."

They eked out a poor living, however, as long as Marennes were in fashion. In the Salon of 1864, Rousselot, his rival, exhibited his "Dozen of Ostend Oysters," for which picture he received an award; and amateurs henceforth insisted upon Ostend oysters. Rousselot's success was only ephemeral, for five years later Piegealoup snatched away the sceptre from him, and with his famous "Dozen of Cançale Oysters" very nearly obtained a medal of honor. On the eve of Piegealoup's triumph Albéric's father died, more of grief than of privation.

His comrades organized a sale of their sketches for the poor widow; the Fine Arts School granted an annual pension, and the orphan entered with a scholarship into the College Louis-le-Grand; so his mother was not obliged to be a housekeeper, and could occupy a small room on the fifth floor in Montmartre, knitting woollen stockings for her son.

Albéric got on well at college; his professor congratulated him for his translation into Latin verse of

Alfred de Musset's *Rhin allemande*. Then came supreme satisfaction: his poor mother died in the arms of a Bachelor of Letters!

A Bachelor! Ah! of what use was this success to Albéric. On the very day he had translated, at first sight, at the Sorbonne, a passage of some ancient writer upon the contempt of riches, he had caught cold, because his boots admitted water and he was unable to buy new ones. A Bachelor! What good had he derived from his knowledge of the philosophers and dreamy poets?

Why was he not made to learn the trade of a joiner or a plumber, with humble tastes, sleeping well because of physical fatigue, and satisfied with wine drunk at a bar at the end of the day? He envied the lot of the masons elbowing him in the crowd—they were so careless about everything. For Albéric it was misery to wear an old frock-coat and bad boots; it was the double anxiety of the man who is tormented by his thoughts and who can hardly earn his living; it was the pitiful anguish of a poor man who asks simultaneously whether his soul is immortal and how he shall pay his laundress's bill.

It was a sad prospect, for he had little energy. He had been six years a clerk at Cahun and Son's, with a small salary; his situation was irksome to him, but he clung to it.

At his mother's burial he was overwhelmed with grief. He was only eighteen years of age; he was accompanied by his guardian, a painter named Vertbois, who had in his time won the prize of Rome, and

who, without any talent or intrigue, gained a scanty living by orders from the Government.

At that time he was painting for the Court of Accounts an allegory of vital interest: "A Public Accountant Discovering an Error."

After the funeral M. Vertbois had taken the orphan into his studio and gently asked him what he intended to do.

Albéric, alas! could not answer. The principal of the college had asked him to remain there as an usher, in order to prepare for a higher degree; but it was a hard task.

M. Vertbois knew the Cahuns well. They were rich shirt-makers whose name was familiar to every one through the famous placard representing two "swells," one saying: "How do you manage, Viscount, always to have such glossy linen?" the other replying: "It is very simple, Baron; I use Cahun and Son's dickeys, and I need only to change my shirt every fortnight."

All this Cahun tribe, beginning with old Abraham Cahun, the patriarch, the great man, the inventor of the dickeys, and afterward his sons, daughters, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, had had their portraits painted by the former holder of the prize of Rome; and his unfailing brush had fixed upon the canvas, in richly gilt frames that dazzled the eyes, those Jews, with beaks of vultures, and all those Jewesses, with eyes of fortune-tellers, and covered with large jewels. M. Vertbois had spoken of Albéric to Cahun and Son.

Albéric had now been with the firm for six years and never had made much advance. The Cahuns, ruth-

less Jews, applied severely the principle dear to all the masters—to require as much work and give as little salary as possible. They had early judged Albéric's qualifications: a timid young man, arriving punctually at the office, who wrote without grumbling fifty letters a day, beginning: "In answer to your honored letter of the ——," but without any commercial genius, indifferent to the rise and fall of calicoes, ignoring the grave questions of shirt-collars. Upon the grand theatre of European shirt-making this young man would never be anything but a supernumerary, for at the age of twenty-four, after six years passed before a set of books bound in green cloth of Cahun and Son's house, Albéric had reached only the small salary of 1,800 francs a year. It was lucky for him that his masters were ignorant of his inclination for reverie and lounging. What would they, Cahun and Son, people so strictly practical, have thought had they known that their employé was fond of walking about till midnight in lonely districts on starry nights; that he opened at times volumes of poetry at book-stalls, and that often he had deprived himself of a cigar in order to buy a bouquet of violets?

Six years! Good heavens! The finest six years of his youth! and in this atmosphere of *ennui*—in this abject poverty!

Having walked up the Faubourg Montmartre and the Rue des Martyrs, Albéric reached the Boulevard Pigalle, where in the intense fog a tramway's horn was continually heard, and directed his steps toward the miserable restaurant at the corner of the Rue Germain-

Pilon where he used to take his evening meal; he was at times very hungry, but felt disgusted, from his very entrance, at the odors of burnt grease in the place. He raised his hat in passing before the counter where the mistress sat, a short woman with a face pitted like Mirabeau's, and looked for an empty seat.

One only remained, near the kitchen door. The passage would have suited a shooting-gallery. They had prepared a series of small tables opposite one another; the cloths were stained with sauce and wine.

About thirty poor men, whom Albéric knew by sight, were eating voraciously, and near them their shabby hats and coats were hanging, looking like a file of hanged men.

Albéric sat down at a table.

"Good-evening, my dear Monsieur Mesnard," said some customer, seated near a small table, extending his hand. He was reading a newspaper and added abruptly, "Well, have you seen the description of the Session? The Opportunist party is about to abandon its principles again. It is scandalous!"

Albéric had shivered on hearing these words, for he would be obliged to sit opposite one of the greatest bores he knew; he often avoided him, but on that evening he could not do so.

M. Mataboul came from the south of France; he had brown hair, shaggy as a bear's; he was a wine-broker, but politics absorbed his time. Early in the morning, carrying a few phials as samples, he called upon small restaurant-keepers to offer his Chablis for oysters, or any other wine, which he warranted as

natural. But as his time was taken up with politics he had not much success in his business, and wine-dealers got rid of him by humoring him on his favorite subject. Forgetting that he had come to sell a barrel of so-called St. Emilion or some baskets of pseudo Moulin-à-vent, M. Mataboul got heated as he talked and left enchanted, though without an order, retiring with the threat, "Another such financial measure, and we shall have a bankruptcy!" or exclaiming, "If things go on like this we shall not have a navy much longer!"

Albéric, trying to keep his patience, beckoned to the ugly servant who had toothache and whose cheek was wrapped in a handkerchief, and ordered a frugal meal—soup, bread, steak with potatoes, cheese, and a little wine; he ate this bad food from necessity, while he listened to M. Mataboul, who was indignant that the Left party sided with the Right and that France kept an ambassador at the Vatican.

Albéric, the poor clerk, was indifferent as to politics, and would have readily admitted that M. Clemenceau should become the great friend of M. de Cassagnac, and that the republic should send a plenipotentiary to the Grand Lama, provided that the restaurant's broth was more savory and the wine less sour. He asked for his bill.

The suffering waiter added up the amount.

"Two for bread, five for soup, eight for meat, three for cheese, six for wine; one franc twenty centimes, Monsieur."

Out of his two-franc piece he received sixteen sous'

change, and gave two to the waiter. Feeling happy to escape from the southern accent of M. Mataboul, he was leaving the table, when his tormentor exclaimed:

"Monsieur Mesnard, it is my turn now; I will treat you to coffee this evening."

It was really so, for a few days previously Albéric had imprudently treated him to a *mazagran*. He first thought of escaping from this tedious politeness, but what was he to do with himself all the evening? In his little room in the Rue Ravignan he had no more coke, and he could not go to bed at eight o'clock; so he yielded. He bought a ten-centime cigar, offered one to his friend, followed M. Mataboul into a small café of *habitués* of the Boulevard Rochechouart, and there, till nine o'clock, opposite his half cup of coffee, empty for some time, mad with *ennui* and not having the energy to take leave of him, he listened to the wine-broker violently denouncing the waste of public money on railways and accusing M. Jules Ferry of the last epidemic of cholera.

It was, indeed, one of the inconveniences in the sad life of Albéric, this promiscuity of the restaurant and public-house, which forced such very annoying neighbors upon him.

How many broken-down people had he not known! How much stupid talk full of envy had he not heard during his humble meal!

How much time he had lost in listening to the art theories of Gabarel and Planchu, the two landscape painters, with large felt hats—one of whom saw nature in the colors of wine dregs, the other in the colors of an

omelet! How many times Mastock, the orator of the proletariat, with his prison beard and his dirty nails, had solved in the café of New Athens, before Albéric and others, all the difficulties of the social question, and cursed the infamous capitalists for an hour, only interrupting himself to ask the waiter for a wire for his pipe.

M. Mataboul condemned ministerial policy as to the colonies with great heat, and proposed to enlist the Bishop of Angers by force in a battalion of Annamite marksmen, as that prelate had just voted for some millions for the Tonquin campaign. He, M. Mataboul, was becoming in the end such a nuisance that in spite of his fireless bedroom Albéric resolved to return home, and feigning a headache as the pretext for interrupting the conversation, left M. Mataboul to read *Le Temps*. The fog had become thicker and smelled of soot, and the gas-burners showed only aureoles of yellowish light.

"What dreadful weather!" said Albéric, shivering. He reached his house through the hilly lanes and walked up the five flights. While unlocking the door he heard in the room close-by the regular sound of a sewing-machine.

"Suppose," thought he to himself, "I go and say good-evening to my neighbors. Madame Bouquet is not very cheerful, but little Zoé is so interesting."

He rang the bell; the noise of the machine ceased abruptly; a young girl, rather small, but pleasing and looking neat in her sombre gown, opened the door.

"It is only I, Mademoiselle Zoé," said Albéric cheerfully. "How is your mother in this bad weather?"

A sweet smile shone upon Zoé's face; she was not exactly pretty—her complexion was pale, her mouth rather large, but what sincerity in her eyes! what an air of sweet temper!

"Oh, thanks, Monsieur Mesnard," was her reply, "mamma is pretty well. Come in, I beg of you, she will be so pleased to see you."

Albéric entered the small dining-room, which served as a boudoir and reception-room; their one other room was a bedroom. This room was very clean, but encumbered by a large armchair near the stove, in which was sitting, with a royal dignity, a lady in black, about fifty years of age, who must have been formerly very beautiful. She did not look as if she were always amiable, and she seemed accustomed to homage. Albéric bowed respectfully before her, but she preserved her impassibility and replied by a simple gesture of the hand such as a sovereign offers to a courtier.

She occupied, truly, too much of the room, this old lady, so solemn, with her widow's cap; her delicate hands were crossed upon her lap; her feet rested on a stool near the stove. She seemed so egotistical that her only daughter, Mademoiselle Zoé, was lost in the shade of such an imposing lady; but Zoé resumed her work before her sewing-machine, moving the pedal with her right foot and making the stuff slip under the needle.

Formerly, I say, the old lady had been a beauty. It was for this reason that the late Bouquet, a cashier in a large drapery house, had married her without a dowry; she had refused to spoil her hands by house-

hold work, and also on account of her beauty her husband had worked hard and saved nothing.

How can you help surrounding with luxury a beauty whom you adore? You can't refuse her a pleasure, a jewel, a fine gown! The unwary cashier had left his widow penniless, and at the moment when their daughter, wearing short skirts till she was eighteen years of age, had become almost of marriageable age. The beauty's elegant furniture, her diamonds, her Erard piano, seldom touched, had been sold; this realized a few thousand francs, which enabled them barely to subsist in Montmartre.

This money was not yet exhausted, because Zoé, who had inherited her father's activity, had understood their sad situation; she had bought a sewing-machine and worked hard, lavishing her cares upon her mother, who, accustomed to this self-sacrifice, accepted them selfishly.

Her position was that of an unhappy beauty who bore adversity with great courage.

Zoé worked till two o'clock every morning, but then it was right that she should do so, as her mother, when their ruin came, had given up wearing silk chemises and dismissed her manicure. Besides, Zoé was of the same opinion, admiring the fortitude of her mother. When in the morning she laced up her boots, the widow thanked her with the haughty sweetness of Marie Antoinette in her prison as she thanked the gendarme on duty for putting out his pipe, and Zoé's heart was full of admiration, pity, and gratitude. Albéric was the only lodger with whom these ladies were on friendly

terms; he had been the confidant of Madame Bouquet, and was called upon to be a witness of her courage in the midst of her reverses. He was flattered, no doubt, but Zoé's sweet eyes were also the incentive for his occasional visits.

"Monsieur Mesnard," said the old lady, "it is very kind of you to come to see us. In better times I should have offered you a cup of tea; when my husband was alive tea was served at ten o'clock; and I could only drink Caravan tea. Monsieur Bouquet was compelled to buy it at the Chinese shop, as one can not trust servants. But to-day we have no longer that small luxury. Zoé, when she hears me cough in the night, insists upon bringing me egg and milk. She does wrong! I am ready to put up with all privations."

Zoé lifted toward Albéric her moist eyes, which seemed to say: "Is not my mother admirable?" while she kept on working to gain the price of eggs, sugar, and orange-water.

"Zoé is quite right to take care of you, Madame," said Albéric; "it is a consolation for you to be so tenderly loved."

"No doubt," replied the old lady, dryly, looking at Albéric from head to foot, as if she had been a duchess dowager, a prisoner during the Reign of Terror, and he a jailer, wearing a cap with a fox's tail and calling out the names of those doomed to the scaffold. "No doubt Zoé is a good girl and understands the duties of our position—but I regret having alluded to our poverty. I often declare to Zoé that complaints are unworthy of a proud soul, and are of no avail. When

we have to use paraffine, which is dreadful to me, what is the use of regretting the beautiful real Carcel lamps which formerly lighted my little sitting-room? Silence is the chief beauty of misfortune."

The machine was kept working away, and Zoé's eyes, looking to Albéric, shone with enthusiasm for the maternal fortitude. In vain the young man, annoyed by the faded beauty's egotism, wished to change the conversation. Madame Bouquet kept on alluding to her courage in adversity; for instance, she said that the heat of the stove gave her a headache, and that in better times in the past she would have tolerated only a wood-fire in an open grate, but she added that her heart was too sensible to yield to the least complaint against an economical system of heating, though she knew it would shortly bring her to the grave.

Albéric felt abashed as he listened to Madame Bouquet, but at times he cast a glance on Mademoiselle Zoé, and after all she was the object of his visit. For some time past the sewing-machine was not the only thing palpitating in the house; the two hearts of Albéric and Zoé had begun to beat very strongly. But love—marriage—that was a luxury for the rich. Was not Zoé devoting herself entirely to her mother? And the poor clerk of Cahun and Son, having a salary insufficient even for his own wants, how could he think of marrying a poor girl having a load on her back? It would be midsummer madness!

Ten o'clock sounded from the clock in the Louis XVI style—the last vestige of the fine furniture of former times; Albéric got up to take leave.

Zoë's eyes, looking to Alberic, shone!

[*From the Original Painting by N. Briganti.*]

we have to use paraffine, which is dreadful to me, what is the use of repairing the beautiful real Carcel lamps which formerly lighted my little sitting-room? Silence is the chief beauty of misfortune."

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J. Brigantt

Madame Bouquet dismissed him with nearly as much cordiality as that in which the resident of the court of assizes invites a witness to go and sit down after his evidence, but he was escorted by Mademoiselle Zoé to the threshold, and received from her a sweet smile, which meant, "You do not displease me, and I know well that I am to your taste, but it is not possible."

Alas! the feelings of poor people are similar to the November rosebuds; they bud, but do not open. Albéric went up to his room, which was of the temperature of Iceland; he hastened to put himself between his icy sheets and became a prey to violent despair. Never had he suffered so keenly through his misery, but his anxieties were overcome by sleep. He was young, and could not yet understand the beautiful line of Saurin in the tragedy of *Spartacus:* "Ah! how long the night is, when sorrow can not be assuaged!"

He cursed his fate and slept soundly.

The next morning he awoke at seven—the offices opened at eight in the Rue du Sentier—and he noticed that the fog had lifted, that the sky was clear. Although the water was frozen in his basin, Albéric dressed quickly, came down the five flights of stairs, spent eight sous out of the ten remaining for a cup of coffee, and as he would receive his salary on his arrival at the office, he bought a cigar with his last penny. On the pavement of the Rue Breda, a man with a cap and a shabby woolen waistcoat, looking like an honest old workman, walked up to his side, and stretching forth his gnarled hand, whispered to him: "No work

— eaten nothing since yesterday morning—charity, please."

Albéric was forced to hasten his steps, looking like a selfish man refusing alms; he felt that most bitter of pains, a poor man's grief at being unable to assist a poorer one.

He presented himself at the office treasury, quite sad.

"Well, Mesnard," said the old Jewish cashier, as he gave him a one-hundred-franc note and fifty francs in gold, "well, they have drawn it at last, the big prize, those dilatory directors of the International Lottery. Last night you could not walk on the boulevards! And I have heen stupid enough to take five tickets, and my hundred sous are lost."

"As for me, Monsieur Schwab," replied Albéric, "I shall not even have the disappointment of not finding my number on the list. I don't recollect where I have put it."

As he opened his portfolio to put in his bank-note, he perceived a blue paper projecting from its leather pocket. It was his lottery ticket.

"By Jove! here it is, and it is the number three million, nine hundred and eleven thousand, four hundred and fifty-seven."

"Then, my dear Monsieur, allow me to give you *Le Petit Journal* containing the list," said the cashier. "I am sure it is correct, for I have compared it with the one I bought yesterday. I have not even won one of the small prizes of one thousand francs."

Alberic could not help smiling at the cunning of the

old Jew; Father Schwab was indeed scrupulously attentive in all circumstances.

"Let us see at once," exclaimed Albéric, joking. "But, as you know, I am very exacting—it is a great sum I want or nothing!"

Holding the paper in one hand, his ticket in the other, he repeated:

"Let us see!"

Suddenly he began to tremble, and turning frightfully pale, opened his eyes, and uttered a cry of surprise and a deep sigh.

The number of the big prize was the same as that of his ticket! He had won five hundred thousand francs!

Then he opened his mouth and said in a hoarse voice: "I—I——" A rush of blood occasioned a great buzzing in his ears, he staggered, recoiled three steps and sat down, with his knees tottering under him, on the velvet lounge near the desk. Old Schwab rushed out from the rails of his desk, calling for help; several employés ran up and lavished their cares on Albéric. He got up abruptly, waving his lottery ticket above his head with the gestures of a madman; he burst out laughing, with tears in his eyes, and shouted with all his might: "I have won the big prize, the five hundred thousand francs!"

If, instead of these people, choked in the bitterness of their envy, there had been one calm witness, he would have shivered before this man intoxicated with happiness and would have thought that extreme joy is a terrible thing!

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST PLUNGE

IF you are fond of lounging, you have most likely observed, gazing with a fascinated stare, before the windows of Véry at the Palais Royal or outside Potel and Chabot's place in the Rue Vivienne, one of those men who wander over the pavement of the streets of Paris and keep on wearing, till the bright days of June, an old paletôt with a moth-eaten fur collar, and in winter shivering under an alpaca coat faded by the last dogdays. It makes you shiver also to see the famished glance cast by such a poor creature upon the baskets of hothouse fruit, the clusters of partridges and splendid quails, the fat turkeys seasoned with truffles. Have you at times observed the flame of desire shining in the eyes of a collegian with a budding beard who is contemplating, at a hair-dresser's window, a fine figure in wax in a very low bodice, holding upon her little finger in an affected attitude the lace of her rose-colored stays? It was in that state of great desire that Albéric had lived hitherto, like a poor man before the window of an eating-house, or a young sentry of the Turkish army looking through the keyhole of the harem.

And suddenly he was rich; he was on the point of having half a million in the bank, and all the pleasures of life were before him. He would certainly not buy stocks and live on his income in perfect indolence; he had wished, for some time at least, to enjoy life as much as he had hitherto been prevented from doing so; to live as a nabob without refusing himself any fancy, and to have a taste of all fruit that might tempt him.

"Life owes me this gratification," thought he, feeling in his pocket his precious lottery ticket. "I wish to obtain compensation for my years of misery, and I shall be satisfied only after spending one hundred thousand francs. After that we shall see that enough will still remain to be independent." Albéric's heart was not selfish, so he said to himself, "I shall do some good with it, too." As soon as it was known he had won the big prize he became the lion of the day. Twenty reporters caught him as he jumped out of his bed in his humble room in the Rue Ravignan; they depicted his room, his person, and for two days he was the subject of newspaper articles.

At once the thick cloud of Parisian ravens swooped down upon the lucky man. Beggars rushed to him from the four cardinal points; the crafty Alsatian who, having chosen to remain French, was unable to conceal his Marseilles accent; the humble inventor who exhibits a bald head; the swindler, full of effrontery. He received numerous letters, full of errors, sealed with crumbs of bread and swollen by torn and greasy testimonials; he heard those entreating voices

accompanied by the odor of absinthe. He was also favored in his humble room with the visit of a promoter, with a fur-lined topcoat and a heavy gold chain, who wished by force to make him take a founder's share in an infallible affair, a live enterprise, namely, to try to find the treasure of the Armada! A respectable father of a family, who diffused an odor of cassia, told him he would shoot himself on the spot if he could not get two hundred francs which, in his delirium, he had taken from his employer's cash-box to feed his five young children, of whom two were twins. Since Albéric's luck had become known, not a day had passed without his being requested by letter to take an interest in a young lady, twenty years of age, very pretty, of refined education; she would travel willingly with a gentleman, alone. He was asked to buy a castle surrounded by a park of one hundred times two acres and a half, and to insure his eternal salvation by subscribing largely to the rebuilding of a religious edifice.

Disgusted at the sight of this swarm of flies which hovered round him as they would round a carrion, and wishing all these people to lose sight of him, Albéric resolved to leave his lodgings immediately.

"To all who come to ask for me," said Albéric to his *concierge*, "answer, 'Gone away without leaving any address.' Send my letters to the Hôtel Continental, where I shall sleep to-night. I shall keep my rooms, and I pay you now a year's rent in advance, and here are one hundred francs for yourself. Go and fetch me a cab; bring my luggage down while I

go to bid farewell to Madame Bouquet and her daughter."

He had been rich just two days.

Cahun and Son, on receiving his resignation, had showered attentions on him, and had advanced him a few thousand francs. For the last two days he had often thought of his fair neighbors, who had been the first to congratulate him on his good luck. As he intended to make some people happy, he wished to begin with them. But how? These ladies were proud; they would certainly be offended by a gift.

His fortune had soon caused him two regrets: one to have given alms to unworthy people, because he had been obliged to throw a few louis of gold to annoying beggars; the other that he could not succor a misfortune which moved him so much.

Albéric felt his heart beat quickly the moment he rang the bell; no doubt he had a very easy means of associating his happiness with that of the young, innocent girl—he could marry her. But then, how could he become a quiet citizen so soon? How could he so quickly invest his capital? It was too reasonable a scheme; and the terrible Madame Bouquet was an obstacle. Zoé would never consent to separate herself from her mother.

Albéric shivered at the idea of having of live with the aged beauty, who at the dinner hour would get herself up as if she were going to the scaffold. He would not order his first black coat for the mayor's or the vicar's sake.

He wanted to know life first, and to enjoy fortune

and liberty. Another drawback of his money—it withered in its bud the first sentiment of tenderness in his heart and inspired him with selfishness. His visit was very short. The ladies were breakfasting off a veal cutlet—the best part, of course, eaten by the mother, and Mademoiselle Zoé picking the bone. He apologized for disturbing them, but he had come to take leave of them, not for good, however, he said, and he asked their permission to make them an occasional visit to know how they were and to pay them his respects. He said he should take away with him the kindest remembrances of his old neighbors; and he assured them—here he seemed a little confused—that if ever he could be useful to them in any way, they could rely upon his friendship. In the midst of this offer of service, made with perfect sincerity, Albéric was interrupted by the glance of Madame Bouquet.

"You must know, Monsieur," she replied, "that you are speaking to a lady fallen into misfortune, but very proud. Learn that the mother of a girl of twenty years of age could not accept under any pretext whatever the least help from an inexperienced young man whom she hardly knows. Don't suppose that your chance fortune entitles you to play the part of a generous man—that is to say, an impertinent one—with a woman of the highest character, who would rather starve than contract a debt of gratitude toward anybody."

Albéric sought a look from Mademoiselle Zoé, but, being overawed by her mother, she kept her eyes

fixed on her plate. So, after a few icy words, Albéric, feeling offended, withdrew abruptly.

"May they go to hades, the haughty fools!" he murmured, in descending the stairs. "I shall not be in a hurry to pay them another visit." He jumped into the cab; the *concierge*, with his head uncovered, opened the door respectfully and ordered the man to drive to the Hôtel Continental. Although dressed in his best clothes, Albéric was received coolly there on account of the slightness of his luggage; they thought of lodging him at the top of the house, but a piece of twenty francs taught the servant with a gold band round his cap that one must not judge the new lodger by his appearance, and Albéric was installed on the second floor in a pretty room.

The servants were inspired with the greatest respect when, on going to the telephone, he sent for a few celebrated purveyors. They ran to bring the bootmaker and the tailor, who justified the proverb, "the ill-dressed tailor, the untidy shirt-maker." But they were great artists, and, thanks to the words "ready money" and "in advance, if you like," they promised to dress their client according to the very latest fashion, entreating him to allow himself to be guided by them.

Albéric gave them *carte blanche*, and the overjoyed tailor recommended a certain jacket to wear in the morning ride on horseback as a delicious article. Afterward, to open his eyes to the ways of elegance, he warned him that this coat could only be worn till noon. If at a quarter past twelve one were to go out

with this coat on, it would simply mean dishonor. For afternoon visits the illustrious artist would make him a jacket, his latest, to which he attributed nearly orthopædic qualities, declaring that it would confer on a deformed man the proportions of an Antinous, and asserting that this masterpiece had enabled several dandies among his clients to contract rich marriages. With the bootmaker Albéric had a small dispute, for he had stated that he did not wish boots with pointed toes. An intense grief appeared on the artist's face, who exclaimed: "But, Monsieur, think of the pointed toes of the Prince of Wales!" Albéric understood that he had been wanting in tact and yielded directly. After some conversation with the artists, he felt ashamed of his poor suit from *La Belle Jardinière*, where he had bought clothes formerly, and he was sorry he was obliged to wear it a little longer. But then he thought of his fortune, and self-confidence came back to him. "Bah!" said he, "I am not, after all, worse dressed than an English tourist."

At dinner-time he entered the dining-room proudly, dazzling with electric light, objected to dine at the *table d'hôte*, and asked for a separate table. At once the waiters became zealous. Guided by the advices of a waiter, who dictated his *menu* with Napoleonic decision, Albéric enjoyed a first-class dinner, drank a bottle of *Pontet Canet*, brought by the butler (in an osier crate) with as much precaution as if it had been a princely child, newly born, whose frail existence might have been endangered by a false movement.

While taking his coffee and smoking a Havana cigar

adorned with a red paper ring, upon which were printed these words, "For the Nobility" (which was indeed flattering), Albéric confessed his inexperience as a man of pleasure. He was rich, yet he could not properly order a pair of trousers or a dinner. A guide was necessary, a friend to introduce him to pleasure-parties. Where should he find him? Eh! By jingo! had he not his old comrades at college? Timid and proud, because poor, he had lost sight of them for some time; with his salary of eighteen hundred francs a year, how could he preserve ties of friendship with young men whose pockets were well lined? No, it was impossible; but now he was on the same footing with these sons of rich families; surely he would find at least one of them to assist in his education.

He soon found a large number of friends.

There were various reasons why he should have met with a kind reception from many of his old comrades, for the winner of a great prize meant a good acquaintance. Albéric offered his old schoolfellows a princely breakfast, with truffles, and great familiarity reigned.

Touching remembrances of college were evoked, such as a story about the rearing of silkworms inside the desks.

Albéric was pleased to renew acquaintance with big George Bordier, who was so lazy at college and was now an employé in the Exchange and well known in the sporting world. He saw again little Santelet, formerly so turbulent in the English class, who had become something of a journalist, had collaborated

in some librettos of operettas, and went behind the scenes in the small theatres. Albéric, though amiable toward his other comrades, who were nearly all married, intended above all to cultivate the friendship of these two frequenters of the boulevard, who had remained bachelors and were full of levity; they were just the friends to guide him into this Parisian life he was sighing for with the ardor and ignorance of a starving man from Peru, or of a Chilian who had just arrived.

The fat Bordier and the little Santelet appreciated the preference of their dear comrade, and gave him a proof of their sympathy. At the hour of the *petits verres*, amidst the smoke, when the guests, all speaking at the same time, produced a noise similar to the croaking of a hundred frogs in a marsh, the stockbroker's clerk took Albéric into the recess of a window and entreated him, for his own interest, to put twenty-five or thirty thousand francs into an affair of great promise—an insurance company against losses in gambling, a proposal which he received with a Machiavellian air. "We will speak of it again," said he. The journalist showed his great joy at having met again an old friend by borrowing from him, for a few days, or forever, the small sum of ten louis in gold.

With such masters Albéric made rapid progress in the art of fast living.

A clever upholsterer, particularly skilful in increasing the amount of a bill, furnished an *entresol* for him in a new house in the Rue de Châteaudun, where he laid such heavy hangings and deep carpets that one

might have believed it had been specially arranged to commit a murder and to stifle the cries of the victim, and Albéric filled the room with so many articles that he could not move for fear of breaking a piece of china.

He adorned the walls with so-called examples of good masters, quite small but in enormous frames; one was a false Diaz, a very indifferent autumn scene; another was a false Ziem, a Venice which seemed to have been painted with Chartreuse and Curaçoa. He had also as many deities from India, China, and Japan, hideous and of doubtful authenticity, as if he belonged to the yellow race. Launched suddenly into fast life, Albéric had a bed, modelled upon Madame de Pompadour's, to sleep in late and badly; a library full of selected volumes, well bound, but never read; he seldom breakfasted in his dining-room, in the Renaissance style, except when he was unwell; then he took a boiled egg and a cup of tea. He had even a valet, whose chief duty consisted in reading the journals and smoking his master's cigars; he also read the letters forgotten on the table, and, thanks to his black plush breeches and his cloth gaiters, succeeded in pleasing some female neighbors.

Albéric, absorbed by his study of elegant life, was rarely at home. Early in the morning he jumped into his brougham and went to take a riding-lesson. After fifteen days of lumbago he was foolish enough to go out with an animal which was too spirited; he was thrown from his horse, in a heavy rain, into the mud on the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. After an hour's

trouble he entered his brougham and ordered his coachman to drive him to the fencing-room, where, although he was peacefully inclined, he endeavored to learn how he could kill a man according to the rules, in bending and breaking foils upon the fencing-master's pad. This was done under the directions of his new mentor, big Bordier, who was addicted to all sports and gymnastic arts, and who never missed a race meeting nor an assault of arms.

At noon Albéric arrived at the Drinkers' Club, which in reality was called the Philharmonic New Club; the members were persuaded they were all people of the best quality, and so they conferred this gracious nickname on the club in preference.

It was there, in breakfasting with his two friends, Bordier and Santelet, that Albéric finished his education as a modern dandy. After all, the question was reduced to this: to be up to date or not to be so, to know what was *chic* from its opposite. Thus, to be furnished with a safe tip for betting by a jockey was quite the fashion; to smoke a short brier pipe in the street when going home in evening dress was *chic*. One more requisite was wanting: it was to show one's self as much as possible *fin de siècle*. For instance, a duchess bearing an historical name who used to go every Friday to applaud the artists of the Chat Noir was named the *ne plus ultra* of the *fin de siècle*. Albéric had some intelligence and the gift of assimilation. He soon understood all these fine shades of distinction. Gambling went on at the club on a great scale. Every night after the theatres they played for heavy stakes,

and, of course, nothing was more *chic* than to heat one's brain till five o'clock in the morning under the large shade of the green table, and to lose or to win "a large sum" with an air of great indifference. So noble an employment of one's time and faculties was likely to tempt Albéric, who was not without self-love. His counsellors explained to him how laudable it was to take other people's money by the force of a knave of diamonds, or to empty one's purse into the pocket of the first comer by the order of a nine of spades.

This pupil in "high life," who had made such decided progress, used to spend entire nights handling counters and cards and repeating till dawn the harmonious monosyllables "*Carte*, *Bac*, *Buche*," returning home at the hour when the sweepers' work begins in Paris, and waking up at noon with his head dry and burning and a coppery taste in his mouth.

In the first two months of that kind of existence thirty thousand francs had gone, but he had acquired useful knowledge. The tailor had no longer need to declare that one must not wear a jacket in the afternoon, nor the bootmaker to induce him to wear boots with pointed toes. He was henceforth incapable of a single error in the matter of toilet. He knew that a gentleman who puts on straw-colored gloves commits an error, and that it suffices to hold them in one hand, quite new; that for travelling one can, and even must, wear a shirt with colored front, but with a white collar, and many other important things. He had caught the English style of walking in the street, the head

thrown back, the elbows out; and the way of holding a thin umbrella horizontally, as if it were a heavy burden. How many other useful notions he had acquired! Nobody would have dared to compare in his presence the race-course of Chantilly with that at Auteuil.

The Eastern cigarettes of the Hôtel de Baden must not be mentioned, as tolerable ones could only be got at the Grand Hôtel; and in spite of all your assertions, Voison's was the only place where you could eat a *salmis* of woodcock. Jules Santelet, journalist, was one of the greatest friends of Albéric; he was well known in the theatrical world. Writing for a journal articles upon plays under the ingenious pseudonym of "*Petit Blanc*," he kept Parisian society acquainted with scandals from behind the scenes, such as: "Our readers will learn with pleasure that the little son of Mademoiselle Fleur de Pecher, the charming singer of the Bouffes de l'Ouest, is quite cured of the whooping-cough, from which he was suffering for the last few weeks. The public will share, as we do, the joy of the delightful *divetta*." "We notice in the list of the jury for the next assizes of the Seine the name of M. le Banqueroutel, the amiable manager of the Théâtre des Fumisteries Parisiennes."

A penny-a-liner announcing news so important, and who lately, by two lines in the journal, had caused a lost Havana dog to be brought back to the soprano in the Opéra Comique, must have a certain influence behind the punchinello cloaks; so he had made himself a fifth collaborator; his name was on the bills,

and he received one per cent. for his share in some librettos of operettas. On the boulevard petty actors bowed to him respectfully, hoping that a few words of praise might be inserted in his journal. Managers of theatres bestowed some attentions upon him; Braillard, the great comic, was very familiar with him; and a wealthy man named Rouyeaud, paid for his applause of actors, invited him at times for some pheasant-shooting on a suburban estate he owned on the banks of the Marne.

Such a man was the very person to introduce Albéric into this mysterious paradise of the *coulisses* which, at a distance, appears to stupid people to be something like Mahomet's heaven, while in reality refined feelings are shocked by steep stairs, dark passages, scenes coarsely painted; the comediennes are tattooed like cannibals and the odors are a mingling of dust, stale perfume, and leaking gas. And that's the reason why all Parisians envy inwardly the luck of the fireman on duty.

The Théâtre des Fumisteries had just produced a play with costumes and couplets, with the title *Take it Away! It is Heavy!* M. Santelet, who, as a petty journalist supposed to be comic, was obliged to attend the first performances, and asked Albéric to accompany him.

The play—if one might call a tissue of incoherent scenes by that name—was very stupid. Surrounded by a few girls in low bodices, most of them knock-kneed and singing very false, the famous buffoon, Oscar, gave out numerous puns borrowed from the

well-known work, *A Million Puns for a Sou.* The public, however, was charmed with the nonsense and applauded frantically. Suddenly, at the moment when Oscar—he had lately been decorated with Academic palms—had just been slightly kicked and the gallery was applauding, a tall girl of some beauty, whose hair was of pale gold, but whose eyes were as blue and ferocious as those of a Valkyrie—although born in Paris and a laundress by trade—came on the stage and was also applauded frantically; but an employé of the theatre had paid for this applause by regaling the *claqueurs* with cassia before the performance.

At the sight of Mademoiselle Acacia, Albéric felt that he had quite lost his heart. She personated the future Metropolitan Railway, and her headdress was a small painted cardboard locomotive, with a white feather imitating the smoke; she sang, with a harsh voice and the accent of Belleville, several couplets with the refrain: "I am the Metropolitan, tin, tin, lintintin!" She was indecently attired, and was for that reason the more applauded. She was a revelation, a great success; and Jules Santelet used this sonorous phrase when describing her in the paper: "Mademoiselle Acacia was a nascent star who sang divinely."

The journalist, at the first performance of *Take it Away! It is Heavy!* introduced his friend to the actress, and at once she held Albéric fettered to her triumphal car. He "protected" this promising artiste, and henceforth spent delightful days. In order

to be quite close to her and oftener to hear Mademoiselle Acacia declaring, to some paid spectators, in ecstasy, that she was "the Metropolitan, tin, tin, lintin-tin," Albéric subscribed for a stall in the first row. He passed all his evenings there and became the friend of the kettle-drummer, an excellent musician who had composed the score of an opera in five acts twenty-five years ago—perhaps a masterpiece. In order to earn his bread, he played the kettle-drum in the orchestra, and even at times other instruments, such as the triangle, tambourine, Chinese hat, bells, and castanets. One evening during the intermission, Albéric, who counted upon Mademoiselle Acacia's affection and was on the point of advancing a pretty large sum to the director, then in great need, so that she might appear at the Opéra Comique, acquainted the old kettle-drummer with his scheme. "Don't you think she would be charming in *Les Dragon de Villars?*" That amiable individual simply answered him by taking a pinch of snuff and saying: "Are you mad? that guinea-hen!" Albéric, wounded in his tender feelings, changed his seat, and, being now near the stringed instruments, soon entered into familiar conversation with the double bass.

This artist, a modest musician of military appearance, with the heavy moustache of a sergeant-major, played every night in the orchestra and in the daytime performed on the trombone in the Republican Guard. "Tell me frankly your opinion," Albéric said to him; "don't you fancy seeing her in *The Black Domino?*" The musician was as severe as the un-

recognized *maestro*. "That goose!" he exclaimed; "you are joking!" Albéric was rather discouraged. "Have I been mistaken," thought he to himself, "in believing Mademoiselle Acacia destined to become a great artiste?"

For some time back her rapacity had tired him. She became furious at hearing any celebrated singer's name, and she could not pass near a jeweller's window on the arm of her lover without falling into ecstasies over a bracelet or a brooch. Besides, she had as a duenna a hideous old woman, a so-called aunt, who formerly used to cry fish in the streets, and she annoyed Albéric by her excessive familiarity. So he separated from Mademoiselle Acacia, having palliated his abrupt departure by the gift of an ornament set with sapphires.

In order to console him, his friend, the stockbroker's clerk, fat Bordier, who liked stables so much, took him to the Circus of the Champs-Elysées, where all Paris was then admiring a young American, Miss Nelly, who was unrivalled for standing on her knees upon a wire while juggling with cup and balls. No doubt it was an inferior art, and one for which a gentleman who had just been so generous toward a "diva" should not have cared. But Miss Nelly—ah, these fair women!—was pretty enough to tempt St. Antony himself. Thanks to Bordier, Albéric got acquainted immediately with the young rope-dancer and was soon behind the scenes, that is to say, in the stable opposite the box of the elephant, who looked at him with a bantering air. Albéric was smitten with Nelly,

and in his dreams he saw the beautiful American surrounded by a halo of cups and balls. She was, however, a well-behaved person—as is often the case among mountebanks. The family was numerous. There was the grandfather, who was once celebrated for his feats on the parallel bars; being old, he now rested on his laurels and only trained a few clever dogs for pastime. Then there was the father, called the gunman, who carried a cannon on his shoulders and bet two hundred francs that none of the company could do the same. The mother was a "strong woman," who climbed nimbly upon her husband's shoulders, and in that difficult position she crossed her arms and held a human pyramid formed by her three sons, who had a fine future before them, and had had their limbs dislocated from the cradle. The fourth son, the eldest, being delicate, was the clown, and had been very successful in training a pig to do all the performances of a circus. Now, this family was full of morality, and its members never lost their equilibrium upon the tight-rope of virtue. So when Albéric, who came often to the stables, dared to speak of love to Miss Nelly under the mocking eyes of the elephant, the charming girl, lowering her eyes like an *ingénue* of M. Scribe's comedies, said, "Speak to my mother."

To encourage him, she gracefully gave him to understand that her mother would overcome the objections of her father to a son-in-law inexperienced in gymnastics who could not present his tender request between two somersaults.

In spite of the beauty of Miss Nelly, Albéric, who had not thought at first of any such a plan, was afraid of entering a family capable of opening the first quadrille of the wedding ball by walking on their hands; so he made a prompt retreat. Thus his absurdly useless life passed on. Every day, foils broken upon the pad of the fencing-master—every day, meals at the restaurant and such discussions with the waiter as, "I say, Louis, you can't make me believe that this Pommard is the same that you gave me last time;" every night spent in cards at the club.

He had no friends but parasites, did no good actions, gave only reckless gifts, and squandered gold.

Now he was laying his homage at the feet of a pretty star of a *café chantant*, who amidst a blaze of diamonds sang the fine romance, destined to be heard round the world, "Something Tickles My Back." This kind of life had lasted a year; Albéric had spent almost all of the first hundred thousand francs of his big prize. Poor fool! spoiled by money, like so many others.

One morning in November Albéric, who by chance had gone to bed before midnight, woke up about seven, sick at heart, and began to reflect. "I must admit," said he, "I have led a fast life; my excuse is that I was dying of inanition, that I threw myself too gluttonously upon food, and now I can not digest it. I am truly *blasé*. He who would have prophesied to me that in spite of my fortune I should have been tired after a year of all the pleasures of a rich man would have astonished me much. It is so, however.

I am bored. My comrades of the club are stupid, and I am sick of truffles. I won yesterday a bank of three hundred and ninety louis, without the least beating of the heart. Shall I change my way of living? By Jove, no! there is some good in all that disgusts me to-day, and were I to renounce it, I feel sure I should regret it. Now, what I want is a sort of half-moral and half-intellectual remedy! I must become again, for a few days, the poor devil I was formerly, and after that——"

Suddenly he got up and exclaimed, clapping his hands: "I am a fool! Nothing is easier! I paid a year's rent in advance. I still have my humble room in the Rue Ravignan. I can sleep there this very evening. I shall go and take my meals at my humble restaurant, and I shall spend an evening at the *café* with Monsieur Mataboul. This is the very thing I ought to do; I shall soon have some new sensations. I shall again try my former miserable life; and, to complete my scheme, I must make myself again commercial correspondent for ten hours at a stretch at Messrs. Cahun and Son's. Ah, I am sick from satiety! Well, I know what will cure me! A cure for discontent! I feel sure the cure will not take long. It would be surprising if nights in an icy room, dinners at twenty-two sous, and the slavery of stupid work should not restore me quickly to taste and a desire for a soft bed, good living, liberty, and idleness. A cure for discontent! I have found the name and the cure itself—I will begin it from to-day."

CHAPTER III

THE CURE

ALBÉRIC had made this important resolution when the valet, the fine gallant in black plush breeches, entered the room, bringing a cup of chocolate of a delicious perfume; but the young man, who wished to begin his course of mortification at once, resisted this first temptation. "What!" exclaimed the Don Juan of the ladies' maids, "Monsieur Albéric is dressing before I have lighted the fire? Monsieur does not take his chocolate?"

"No, Joseph, I must go out directly and be absent for two or three days. I don't want you—go!"

Albéric recollected then that he had still in his wardrobe the suit of the Belle Jardinière establishment and the topcoat under which he had shivered in former times on winter mornings when hastening toward his office.

He cast upon his old clothes the philosophical glance of Sixtus Quintus recognizing the old rags worn as a swineherd. He dressed hastily and saw, the first time for a year, Paris in the early morning, with its passers-by fully occupied; the women hastening to their business, the noisy carts of milkmen, and the scavengers' carts.

"By Jove!" said Albéric, shivering in the damp mist, "my treatment begins to work. There was some good in my coat lined with otter. I shall put it on again with pleasure."

In a dirty milk-shop of the Rue de la Grange-Batelière, where he used to go formerly, Albéric drank a wretched cup of coffee, and his stomach regretted the perfumed chocolate, stoically rejected, on which the Lovelace with fine gaiters regaled himself!

"One more excellent effect of the cure," thought Albéric, while spreading rank butter upon soft bread; "here is milk which shows the great progress of modern chemistry, as no cow is responsible for it! Chocolate is indeed very good, and Joseph makes it well. Hum! I believe my cure will be rapid. Let us go now to Messrs. Cahun and Son. I must devote myself to one of my drudging days of former times; it will be homœopathy—*similia similibus.*"

He reached the famous shirt-makers' house in the Rue du Sentier at eight o'clock, and found Father Schwab, the old cashier, at his post.

"You, Monsieur Mesnard!" exclaimed the man, who thought he was no longer entitled to speak familiarly to a rich man; "you so early—by what chance?"

"Monsieur Schwab," replied Albéric, "I come to ask you a favor."

"What is that, Monsieur Mesnard?" said the eager cashier.

"Simply to allow me to spend to-day, and perhaps to-morrow and the next day, in the offices in helping my ex-comrades in the correspondence, exactly as

when I was a clerk here. I will even request Monsieur Abraham to give me a lot of work to do."

Old Schwab was dumbfounded and showed great uncertainty about the mental state of Albéric, but Albéric burst out laughing and said:

"No, Monsieur Schwab, I am not mad, be reassured; anyhow, I am not suffering from the 'mania of riches.' If I mean to become for a time the poor young man I used to be, it is simply to win a bet. Yes, the gentlemen of the club have declared jocosely that I could no longer, after my year of pleasure, live one day of my former life. I have accepted the bet, and you will be witnesses, all of you, that I shall fulfil all the conditions. You see I wear now the little suit of the Belle Jardinière which I wore a year ago. Every day that I shall pass here represents a good sum, and it will all end with a good dinner, which I promise to my ancient companions in slavery. Is it agreed?"

The thought that prodigal Christians were going to lose their money in a stupid wager was enough to delight the old Hebrew, and the promise of a good dinner pleased him. He left his desk at once and entered with Albéric into the office, where a dozen unfortunate clerks, bent over enormous books, added up long columns of figures.

Albéric, who was received with exclamations of surprise, shook hands with every one, renewed the promise of a good dinner, and took his place at his desk amid bursts of laughter.

He received a quantity of work from M. Abraham —a splendid Jew with a black and curly beard,

who reminded you of those *basso relievos* of Ninevah at the Louvre; he resembled the personages represented with tiaras on their heads who carry lions under their arms as easily as a man of business holds a portfolio of black shagreen, or an old lady her Havanese dog. During the whole day Albéric went on with a voluminous correspondence from South America, where Cahun and Son had established a very large trade. He answered, "In reply to your esteemed favor of the ——" to the orders of all the shirtmakers of Chili, Peru, Brazil, and the Argentine Republic. He sent a very large quantity of collars to Rio Janeiro; cuffs and separate shirt-fronts were also sent in great numbers to Buenos Ayres and Montevideo. He forwarded in enormous packages, especially to those towns whose names seem to be the warblings of birds, like Guayaquil, or the cries of parrots, like Caracas, a new article of Cahun and Son's house, a cravat with a knot ready made in red, flame of punch, green apple, and lemon-colored satin, all in the very best taste and representing the last Paris fashion for the Spanish-American republics.

Strange phenomenon! the voluntary employé put up with the long hours of work without feeling very much bored. He could not help thinking that it was not much more wearisome to spend a day in writing the same phrases than to remain all night at the club, looking on at the cards of baccarat as they were continually thrown down.

"On this part of the treatment," reflected he, "I foresee that I shall be compelled to insist. Well, the

dose will be double, or more, if necessary, but I am not credulous enough to believe in those moralists' nonsense who maintain that one gets tired less quickly of a task than of a pleasure."

Six o'clock struck, and Albéric found that time had passed pretty quickly. He took leave of old Schwab and his comrades, promising to meet them the next day.

He was soon on the boulevard on his way to Montmartre. A cold, thin rain was falling, and Albéric had no umbrella. He was about to jump into a cab, but suddenly he altered his mind.

"No, I have not the right to do so," said he; "to be wet like a poodle because an umbrella has been forgotten—that is another part of the cure. A cab! what a luxury! and, besides, at the end of the month! Am I mad? I have not money enough to afford to drive. Ah! you did not understand how much more agreeable it was to have a brougham by the month, with your crest on the door! Well, I have a twenty minutes' walk before I reach the small restaurant of the Rue Germain-Pilon, and it is going to pour! Well, forward! this will all be valuable experience."

He was wet through when he arrived.

Nothing was changed; the narrow passage which should have been employed for a rope-maker's workshop was redolent of stew as formerly, and the draught was dreadful. The house had lost its reputation, since some of the small tables were empty, and only ten hats with ten shabby overcoats were hanging on the walls.

When Albéric appeared, the stout manageress, so like Mirabeau, was reminding the maid that a customer had asked three times for his veal, and was as angry as the famous tribune addressing M. de Dreux Brézé. She was indeed amazed to see him; she knew, of course, that he had won the big prize; she could not understand his taste for the abominable cookery of her restaurant after his year of absence. But without caring for the surprise of the ogress, Albéric sat down and looked at the bill of fare. "Monsieur, there is fish to-day," said the servant with the weak voice. This poor woman was still the same; at present she did not suffer from the chronic toothache, but the index finger of her right hand had a whitlow and was wrapped up in dirty linen, the sight of which would have taken away the appetite of a shipwrecked mariner, even upon the raft of the Medusa.

"Let us see this fish!" said Albéric. He was served, on a soiled plate, with very indifferent mackerel. He was shocked at it. "By Jove!" thought he to himself, "my treatment is forced upon me in all its rigor, and I who the day before yesterday, at the Café Anglais, was finding fault with the *chef* and scolding the waiter about a *filet* of sole with shrimps, will next time think it a treat. Certainly my idea is an excellent one, and my cure for discontent will put me to rights in twenty-four hours. There is something wanting, however, to complete my woes; everything here is just what I was wishing for; it makes me feel sick, but to crown it all I should have some of my tedious friends of last year, for example, Monsieur Mataboul! I do regret

his absence because, for some time past, the conversation at the club has been a bore to me; my comrades speak of nothing but horses and idle talk, but Monsieur Mataboul would talk politics to me; I never knew a greater bore than he. Oh, that he were here to fulminate against the encroachments of the clergy, or to denounce to the public the danger of leaving Egypt in the hands of the English Government!"

At this very moment, as if destiny obeyed Albéric, M. Mataboul entered the restaurant; he had with him a pretty, sweet-looking girl about eight years old in mourning garb.

He knew Albéric directly and exclaimed: "Can I believe my eyes!" as in the classical tragedies. "You, my dear Monsieur Mesnard? What! the lucky man, the winner of the big prize, comes back to dine in a humble restaurant! I am charmed to see you again. Will you permit me to sit down at your table?"

"Do so by all means, Monsieur Mataboul. At the moment when you came in I was regretting your absence."

"Now, Josephine," said Mataboul, "bring us some dinner. Once more I assure you I am pleased to see you."

He placed the darling child on a chair and said: "Monsieur Mesnard, you are about to see that she can eat quietly like a big girl. She is only eight years old, but very sensible."

Albéric was much surprised to see this southerner, with wild eyes and the face of a brigand of the Abruzzi, taking care of this child and tying her napkin with motherly carefulness.

"Who is this pretty child?" asked Albéric.

"Oh, it is Mariette," replied Mataboul, "my only niece, who loves her uncle well; is it not so, darling? Ah! my life has been changed greatly during the last six weeks. You see I wear mourning. I will tell you all by-and-by. Let us speak of yourself first, my dear Mesnard, for I am so surprised to find you again in the old restaurant. Pardon me if my question is indiscreet. Since our separation we have had the failure of the Comptoir de Crédit. I do hope you have not deposited your capital in the hands of those swindlers. I should be so sorry if it were so, for you are kind-hearted, and your good luck pleased me very much."

Yes—he was a good fellow, this great talker, Mataboul! Albéric was much moved. When he was unlucky in the heavy game on Saturday evening in the club, Bordier and Santelet, his so-called friends, regarded his losses very philosophically; and at the possibility of a misfortune this Mataboul, nearly a stranger, was really distressed. "Be reassured," replied Albéric to Mataboul, who had just helped his niece to the half of a doubtful mackerel. "No, I am not ruined. I will explain to you that I come here through a whim, a bet. But now tell me about this child."

"The story is not cheerful, I assure you," replied Mataboul. "I had one sister; I was her senior by three years; she was an unhappy widow with this child and kept a small tobacco shop at the Grand-Montrouge; I rarely saw her. I could not help her much—after all, she managed to live. She had done

very wrong to leave the country to marry a Parisian, a bad man, who soon squandered her small dowry. He died, leaving her a widow thirty-two years of age. I paid her three visits a year. Her health had been breaking for some time, but in September last she died without letting me know she was ill. The doctor said she died of anæmia; it is their great word! I have inherited her daughter. I am her uncle, her guardian; but it is annoying that I am an old bachelor. I live in furnished apartments on the Boulevard Pigalle at the Hôtel de l'Univers—you know the house where a shoemaker sells workmen's boots. Luckily they have arranged a small bedroom for Mariette close to my own, and I am sure you are very comfortable there, my darling," added Mataboul; "you are not afraid at night and you know well that uncle leaves the door half-open!"

M. Mataboul, with his terrible face, like that of Fra Diavolo, kissed her tenderly.

"It must be a very heavy burden for you," said Albéric, struggling against emotion; "how do you reconcile this with your former existence?"

"I get on pretty well, I assure you," replied M. Mataboul; "then school is the great resource! I take Mariette to school in the morning; she likes the good Sisters. All day I travel by trams and omnibuses; I cross Paris in all directions; I go to see my restaurant people; I try to sell barrels of wine. I work hard now, for I have to work for two. I wish to economize, to have my own furniture, and to engage a young maidservant. When my day's work is over

I hurry to take the child from school, and I bring her here to dine with me. Afterward we go back to the hotel, and I make her learn her lessons; then it is bedtime, poor little girl! Is it not so, Mariette? If you wish to grow tall and have plump cheeks, you must go to bed early."

"Is it possible, Monsieur Mataboul, you no longer spend your evenings in the café? You read no papers? You care no more for politics?"

"Hardly ever, it is true. I do not even know what happened during the last fortnight in the Balkans. I admit it was very hard at first. Yet I yield to my old fancy at times. I am going now to the Café du Delta, where I ask the waiter to bring Mariette the illustrated papers, and then I read the political papers attentively. You know when these soft-brained senators lately altered the military law? By jingo! I could not resist it! I went to the Delta with Mariette and read the description *in extenso*. I found the child dying with sleep over the *Charivari*. I shall give that up, for it is my duty."

"Duty!" This was a word which Albéric had not heard for a long time.

In his world—at the circus, in the fencing-room, in the precincts of the weighing-room, in the boudoir of Mademoiselle Acacia, behind the scenes of theatres, upon the divan of the club—pleasure was the only word mentioned; yet duty also existed. By this time Mataboul had finished his dinner and was now, carefully as a nurse, wrapping up his niece in a black woollen shawl.

At his departure Mataboul said: "I dare not hope to see you often here, dear Monsieur Mesnard; the fish was not tempting enough to induce you to return. I am so pleased to have met you again; and were it not that I have to make Mariette repeat her grammar lesson, we should have gone to the café. I should have liked to know the latest news about the Eastern question. Servia is in a sad state; this abdication of King Milan is a grave affair. But Mariette must look over the rules of the participles. Good-by, again, Monsieur."

Mariette came toward Albéric, who kissed her. How sweet it is to kiss a child! Why did he feel so moved at heart?

"Monsieur Mataboul, it is possible I may have occasion to write to you soon; tell me your address."

"Boulevard Pigalle, Hôtel de l'Univers," replied the wine-broker. "Next time we see each other we shall speak of the last elections. It is intolerable to see the old parties holding up their heads with so much effrontery. Good-night once more."

Albéric left the restaurant soon after; large stars were shining and the wind was cutting.

"This time," reflected Albéric, while going to the Rue Ravignan, "my treatment is at a fault, for so far from being a bore to me, Monsieur Mataboul has affected me very much. I must do something for him and his niece; to admit to one's self that a bore can be also a good man, to become indulgent toward other people's faults, to be reminded that there is wretched poverty nobly borne and to wish to succor it—all this

forms part of the cure for unhappiness and discontent and is a matter for reflection. Let me go now to my old room." He soon arrived, and on entering found the porter, who was a tailor, sitting on a table patching an old garment. He started up with surprise on seeing his old tenant.

"Monsieur Mesnard!" he exclaimed; "is it indeed you? Well, I thought you were no longer in this world. I know you paid me four quarters in advance, but as we heard nothing of you the landlord and I were puzzled what to do concerning your furniture."

"Don't be uneasy, Father Constant," replied Albéric. "Give me my key—I intend to sleep there to-night."

"What! to sleep here! What a strange idea for the winner of the big prize! Your room is full of dust, no doubt, and there has been no fire in it for a year. Think of it! Well, wait till the return of my wife, then I will go and lay the sheets."

Here, let us confess it, Albéric yielded to his first weakness; after all, he thought, to die by cold did not enter into his plan, and even in the old dark days the doorkeeper had looked to his comfort.

"Very well!" said Albéric; "as soon as your wife returns you can go and get my room ready. Now I am going to pay a visit to Madame and Mademoiselle Bouquet."

"Oh!" replied old Constant, "a misfortune has happened to those ladies; the mamma has had an attack."

"Oh, indeed! an attack?"

"Yes—something very bad, the doctor said. These ladies were poor, and now illness adds to the burden.

And poor Mademoiselle Zoé is so courageous, so amiable!"

The old sympathy of Albéric for Mademoiselle Zoé was at once awakened, so he went upstairs nimbly and listened at the door to the noise of a sewing-machine. Alas! it had to be worked more than ever now that misfortune had entered the house.

Albéric rang. Mademoiselle Zoé opened the door. "Ah! mamma," she exclaimed, "here is an unexpected visit which will please you. It is Monsieur Albéric."

Her eyes were full of frankness and her charming smile of welcome enchanted him. She had, alas! become thinner, and her tired eyelids betrayed long nights of work.

Albéric first saluted Madame Bouquet, who had grown older by ten years; her hair was quite gray, and she sat motionless in her armchair. The decayed beauty, now paralyzed, fixed her brilliant eyes upon Albéric and nodded to him without any sign of her former dignity.

"I must apologize," said the young man, "for my long absence. I have been travelling. I have just been informed by old Constant, Mademoiselle Zoé, that your dear mother has been ill. I hastened to make inquiries about her."

"Alas! yes, Monsieur Albéric," replied Madame Bouquet in a doleful voice, "see, I can scarcely move my poor hand; at fifty-two years of age it is hard; and if you knew all the trouble I give to my dear Zoé—she is so devoted to me."

What a change! The old lady had no longer her royal gait, her glance like that of Marie Antoinette before the revolutionary tribunal. And—was it possible?—while she complained she pitied her daughter and spoke of her so tenderly. Yes, indeed! misfortune is good for something. The trials of Madame Bouquet had worked that miracle. Illness had broken down that exacting temper and melted the egotism of her heart. When condemned to submit to the guardianship of her daughter, the mother appreciated at last her admirable child.

Zoé kissed the pale forehead of the paralytic and sat down again before the sewing-machine.

"Mamma flatters me," she said, turning her tender eyes toward Albéric; "what she says is through kindness for me. You could not believe with what great resignation she bears her trial; besides, she is already much improved. You see, I can only give her small attentions, but she has such very great energy that I am certain she will not give way, and you will see, Monsieur Albéric, she will soon be cured entirely."

No! paralysis does not relent, and the half of her body is forever useless. She seems overwhelmed by that calamity, but Mademoiselle Zoé will never admit that she is beyond cure, and tries to keep hope alive in her mother's mind. She repeats over and over again to the poor cripple the flattering assurance of ultimate cure; she persuades her that she has preserved her former fortitude, and—emotions are so dangerous to invalids—she even tries to escape from those maternal caresses of which she was formerly de-

prived. Oh! that she could restore to the infirm lady, now so affectionate, her former faults! How willingly she would consent to endure again the coldness of her mother's nature!

Albéric's heart was beating sorrowfully, although delightfully. Had he been blind? He had never before noticed that, without being very pretty, Mademoiselle Zoé was adorable. How much simplicity in her self-sacrifice! She must have suffered, the poor girl! And what anguish in thoughts of the future! For it was easy to see these unhappy women were on the verge of poverty! Where is the clock of the Louis XVI period? Where are the two fine engravings, remnants of the wreck of the family Bouquet, which used to adorn the walls? At the bric-à-brac dealer's, without doubt! Oh, heavens! they are reduced to that! This exquisite Mademoiselle Zoé—who now and then lifts up her eyes and looks at Albéric sorrowfully, as if to say: "What a pity you are rich!"—was obliged to sell the furniture to save herself and her mother from starving. What a frightful thought!

While Madame Bouquet, with a tearful and stammering voice, told all about her illness and the kindnesses of her Zoé, Albéric, who feigns to be listening to her, abandons himself totally to his future schemes. Truly it was foolish—his life of pleasure! To-morrow he will give notice that he will quit his stuffy *entresol;* he will dismiss his Lovelace with the chocolate-colored gaiters; he will send his resignation to the president of the club; he will forget the addresses of Bordier and Santelet—in short, he will pass a sponge

over his past life. All that life was false—fatigue and disgust were its only results. To do one's duty, to live for others—here is the true means of escaping *ennui.* Duty! he has hardly any to fulfil, as he is rich and alone. Well, he is about to assume some. Ah! you imagine, little Zoé, that I can not love you because I am rich! I will marry you for your beautiful eyes and for the skilful way you make the cloth slip under the needle of your machine. Yes, Mademoiselle, some one will become the respectful son-in-law of Madame Bouquet and will help you to attend the poor cripple; and although he still possesses, in spite of many follies, a capital that will enable him to live on the income, he will begin again to work; not as an amateur at Cahun and Son's, no! but he will go on with some occupation, even if he is obliged to paint, like his father, hundreds of dozens of oysters. There is one thing certain, Mademoiselle Zoé, and it is that he loves you and is going to ask for your hand. He will abandon the life of a bachelor, and will have much less merit in doing so than the kind M. Mataboul had when he gave up politics and his café that his niece might go to bed early.

Albéric rose abruptly, took Zoé by the hand, and led her to her mother's side. "Dear Madame Bouquet," said he, trembling, "pardon me for not having told you the truth. No! I was not absent. I remained in Paris and led a foolish life. I was ungrateful not to have paid you a visit sooner. I was suffering from a dreadful illness known only among the rich; it has cost me a hundred thousand francs and

has somewhat injured my health, but I have followed drastic treatment which has quite cured me. Now, dear Madame, you can with one word make me the most happy or the most miserable of men. I love Mademoiselle Zoé, I dare hope I am not indifferent to her, and I ask you frankly to accept me as your son-in-law."

Oh, heavens! what is the matter with the poor girl? Her fainting head falls upon the young man's shoulder, and then she melts into tears. Truly she must have loved him dearly! She kneels before her mother and takes hold of her paralyzed hand. Albéric himself, deeply moved, kneels also. What could the poor mother do except weep in her turn while blessing the happy pair?

Healed by his "cure for discontent," so short but so efficacious, and having preserved a competency from the wreck of his great prize, Albéric, with his mother-in-law and his young bride, dwells in a very pretty country-house situated at ten leagues from Paris, upon a hillslope by the banks of the Seine. There, on a charming terrace, Madame Bouquet reposes comfortably on pillows and looks at the boats passing by. The young wife has preserved her machine and sits down often near her mother to work.

She is very happy, and her husband has not yet found any better occupation than to love his wife. In the beginning of autumn, in order to beguile the tedious long evenings, he occupied his time in writing French poetry in praise of his dear Zoé. On Sunday M. Mataboul, who is now a wholesale wine-mer-

chant, thanks to a round sum of money lent by Albéric, and is successful in business, comes with his niece to share the family dinner. Then Madame Mesnard lavishes on the little Mariette those tender caresses which make one guess that she will later be a good mother.

As it is pretty hard to get fish in the country, M. Mataboul brings down with him a lobster, ready boiled, whose color does honor to his radical views. For prosperity has failed to spoil him, and he still remains a Republican of the deepest dye. Without neglecting business, he has regained all his interest in politics, and this makes him at times as great a bore as ever. Albéric bears with him, knowing all his good qualities; but Madame Bouquet was terribly scandalized the other day when he loudly expressed his approval of the incorporation of priests in the army, and cried out: "Priests! Bah! Put them all in uniform!" And yet, rather illogically, he has sent his little niece to a convent-school, "because, you see, there is no one except the good Sisters who can teach children properly."

Albéric has completely broken with his friends at the club. Big Bordier, after a rather too lively financial career, has been forced to put the Belgian frontier between himself and the police. And as for Santelet, whose grandfather was master of a merchant-ship and for thirty years dealt largely in negroes for a Nantes ship-owner, he occupies, by a strange phenomenon of atavism, a nearly analagous position. He is now a theatrical manager.

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